Campione! Volume 2

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These are novel illustrations that were included in "Campione! Volume 2".

魔王来臨

カンピオーネ! Campione II

丈月 城

Illustration シコルスキー

た 9-2

カンピオーネ! II 魔王来臨

丈月 城

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草薙護堂は神殺しである。

神を殺し、権能を奪いカンピオーネとなった高校生・草薙護堂。その自称愛人エリカが護堂の高校に留学、護堂との「親密な仲」を公言したことで、媛巫女・祐理や妹・静花も巻き込んで、護堂の平穏な日常は完全に失われてしまった。同じ頃、東欧の魔王・ヴォバンが来日。その目的は祐理!? 神殺しが相撃つ熾烈な戦いの幕が、いま開く!!

神殺し vs 神殺し

二人の王者は並び立たず。
守るため、奪うため…神の権能が激突する!

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Characters Introduction
主要登場人物

草薙護堂（くさなぎごどう）

高校1年生。

軍神ウルスラグナの権能を有するカンピオーネ。

エリカ・ブランデッリ

《赤銅黒十字》の魔術師。

自称、護堂の「愛人」。

万里谷祐理（まりやゆり）

霊視の力を持つ媛巫女。

護堂の「正妻」と称される。

サーシャ・デヤンスタール・ヴォバン

東欧の魔王。最古参のカンピオーネの一人。

リリアナ・クラニチャール

《青銅黒十字》の魔術師。剣の妖精。

アリアンナ・ハヤマ・アリアルディ

通称アンナ。エリカの部下。

草薙静花（くさなぎしずか）

護堂の妹。祐理の茶道部の後輩。

甘粕冬馬（あまかすとうま）

正史編纂委員会のエージェント。

装丁／川谷康久（川谷デザイン）

D
た 9-2

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Authors Introduction
著者紹介

丈月 城

もし自分に四歳で回路基盤を組み立て、
六歳でエンジンを作り上げる才能があったなら、
闘う社長になってグウィネス・パルトロウを
秘書にできるのに！
なんて思う今日この頃です。
一度言ってみたいセリフは「I am Ironman」。

シコルスキー

猫とアシモフが好きな
神奈川県在住のイラストレーター。
最近腹回りが気になりだしました…。

スーパーダッシュ文庫 丈月　城の本

カンピオーネ！ 神はまつろわず
カンピオーネ！ Ⅱ 魔王来臨

丈月城

Illustration

シコルスキー

ホムンネ

魔王来臨

Campione II

エリカ

甘粕

祐理

リアナ

ヴォバン

死せる従僕

サルバトーレ

護堂

静花

「力ずくで突き放してあげる！」

「わたしから逃げられると思うな！」

「特に
変なこともないと
思うぞ？」

「に、新妻――私が護堂さんの？」

「ふたりも
女の人を侍(はべ)らせて、
何、その
王様ポジション!?」

「べつにいいんじゃない？」

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丈月城

Illustration
シコルスキー

魔王来臨

カンピオーネ！

Campione II

■どうも～♪挿絵担当のシコルスキーです。

■二巻では体操服のシーンがちょっとだけ登場します。
昭和世代の僕としては当然のように「あるもの」を描くつもりだったのですが、
担当さんと打合せの際…
担当さん「あ、体操服は短パンかスパッツでお願いします」
担当さん「さすがに今時ブルマはないですからねｗｗ」
しこる「…ですよねーｗｗｗ」
和やかに会話を交わしながら冷や汗かいてました。
この人テレパス！！？みたいな。

■そんなわけで、あとがきカットは祐理のブルマ姿でささやかな反逆です。

■グググググ
http://sikorskysakura.ne.jp/

しこるすきー

Prologue

【Excerpt from the notes of the Council of Elders, Folklore of Dalmatia, Croatia

One day, the bad wolf tried to break into the castle of the pig king.

"Wow, it's been a long time since I came to such a splendid place. Lovely little pigs, please let me enter your castle. I will do nothing bad."

"No, absolutely not. We will give you anything you want, so please leave," the king replied to the wolf, who was begging outside with a coaxing voice.

The wise king knew that the wolf would not keep his promise.

"There is nothing I want. I only wish to enter the castle. If you won't let me in, I will choose other means, you know?"

"Please stop, please stop! As long as we don't have to let you in, we will do anything!"

Ignoring the pig king and his desperate, wailing pleas, the bad wolf breathed out deeply.

When he did, the wolf's breath became a whirlwind that blew away the castle of the pig king. The castle made from many bricks went flying like cotton.

Just like that, the whirlwind escalated into a great storm and blew away everything around the castle.

"Look, isn't it just like I said? You should've calmly let me into the castle. Take this as a lesson to never oppose me again, okay?" the bad wolf sneered at the pig king.

《Commentary The "The Three Little Pigs" had been derived from its original folklore stories "The Wolf and The Goat" and "The Wolf and The Pig". But there is another, bold hypothesis regarding the origin of this legend.

In 1854, Devil King Dejanstahl Voban used his infamous Authority over storms, [Sturm und Drang], to drive the Dalmatian[1] port city Zadar[2] to the brink of destruction. Some researchers believe that, over the course of many years, the memory of this tragedy took an influence on the folktale.

【From the section about Voban, Sasha Dejanstahl, European Mage Directory

He was called [Marquis Voban], but he was by no means a noble.

Born in the first half of the eighteenth century in the area of modern Hungary, he probably didn't have a single relative since birth. The boy lived his life by moving from place to place for more

than ten years, struggling daily just to get some bread, until one day he had succeeded in slaying a god and suddenly rose to become a Campione.

Campione are those who seized a portion of the [Authorities] from the god they murdered. They are feared existences whom magi called [Kings].

But at that time, he was not a [Marquis] yet.

Just a few years later, he attacked the castle of the marquis governing the area and usurped the marquis's status and dominion. But he grew tired of the status within a few years and abandoned it in the end. However, it was the source of the title he still uses - Marquis Voban.

Furthermore, the name Voban came from his peculiar and ghastly sense of humor.

Knowing that the previous marquis had kept a savage dog called "Voban", he picked it as his own family name. Then he ordered the former marquis to serve his relative, the former pet dog...

【Dame[3] Liliana Kranjcar, Achieving an Audience with the [King] in Budapest】

They were in a room of a high-class hotel, the kind that could be found in any country.

As luxurious and pleasant as it was the room that held the [audience] was still a little too common to be called a devil king's palace.

The master of the room was called Sasha Dejanstahl Voban.

He was one of the Campione whom magi throughout the world feared as kings, devil kings.

All of them possessed a tremendous magic power called [Authority]. Those were all plundered from the gods and goddesses murdered by the devil kings' own hands.

"You're Kranjcar's granddaughter? We met four years ago, but I have no memory of your face... ahh, don't think of me as a senile old fool. People in your generation grow up too fast. The same would happen even with a person other than me."

His voice was clear, even intellectual.

His physical appearance was the same. He had a wide forehead, deeply sunken eyes, and his complexion was terribly pale. If one claimed that he taught at some university, everyone would consent .

His silver hair was combed straight and his beard was also carefully shaved clean.

"It is only natural. At that time I was nothing but a child and we met for not even ten minutes. Please bear it no mind."

Liliana Kranjcar bowed as she replied courteously.

She fell on one knee and held her right arm over her chest.

For a greeting in a hotel suite, it was extremely unusual. But on top of being in front of a [king], a knight had an obligation to present herself with suitable courtesy.

The girl who belonged to the magic association "Bronze Black Cross" was still sixteen.

Her handsome features, which gave the impression of a fairy, were more gallant than lovely. Her long silver hair was drawn up in a ponytail.

Yet despite her youth, the girl was a mage holding the title of Great Knight.

Even in Milan, where outstanding talents from all over the world gathered, the only one with comparable talent was the Erica Blandelli of the 'Copper Black Cross'.

"That's splendid. Now then, I think you already know, but I am impatient by nature, so let's get to the point. I called you here all the way from Milan for one reason."

Voban narrowed his emerald eyes ever-so-slightly.

Whenever those evil eyes glittered, any living being before them would turn into masses of salt. It was an authority that he was said to have usurped from the Celtic demon god Balor[4].

[Eyes of Sodom], [Legion of Hungry Wolves], [Sturm und Drang], [Cage of Undead Servants].

Among the mages of Europe, every single one knew a few of his Authorities.

"I take it you haven't forgotten the ritual four years ago? That ritual for the great sorcery to summon a heretic god. I've been thinking about attempting that secret ritual you helped me with once more."

Liliana fixedly looked back at the devil king's face.

That great magic had produced more than just a few victims. Why was he trying such a dangerous ritual again? After pondering over that question for only a moment, Liliana realized.

'A godslayer summoning a god. How can there be any other reason except a fight?'

"Back then, that damn Salvatore got the better of me. I had not anticipated that a fool would get to the summoned god first and snatch it away. You see, I had never dreamed that such a greenhorn would appear in our world!" Voban said indifferently, but the iris of his evil eyes flickered.

Four years ago, that incident had spread the fame of the young devil king Salvatore Doni and his Italian origin throughout the European magical world like thunder. The story of the godslayer stealing the old [king]'s spoils.

Liliana, who happened to be present at that time, remembered the entire story well.

"In three more months, the stellar constellations and the flow of ley lines will form the right conditions to call a god for the first time in four years. I may not be interested in that kind of knowledge myself, but I made a professional make sure. Isn't that right, Caspar?"

All of a sudden, Voban happily redirected his gaze behind Liliana.

Suddenly feeling an eerie presence behind her, Liliana grew anxious as someone had come up unseen and unheard. Just who could sneak up on a great knight like her?

She hurriedly turned around only to sigh.

Standing behind her was an old man dressed in black. The old man nodded awkwardly at Voban's question, as if he was a machine that lacked oil.

There was no expression on his pale face. Neither was there any light in his eyes. They were terribly empty and unfocused.

The appearance of death.

The old man with such an expression couldn't be called anything other than a moving corpse.

(This is a [Dead Servant]!)

Liliana instantly remembered one of the authorities of the old king.

Forcing a human he personally slaughtered to stay in this world as one of the living dead and enforcing absolute obedience as a faithful servant.

It was atrocious. Liliana couldn't help but feel that way.

It was most likely that this corpse once opposed the devil king when he was still alive. He was probably one of the mages who once fought against him. It wasn't something doable through ordinary courage. It was a feat worthy of respect.

But, this Authority defiled that courage and ridiculed that dignity.

Because she inherited the blood of the notable Kranjcar family and belonged to the magic association [Bronze Black Cross], resistance towards this devil king would not be forgiven. Otherwise she would have left on the spot.

.....No.

If the leader of the Italian mages, Salvatore Doni, was in perfect condition, she might have been able to request his protection. But that was currently impossible.

Since the wound he had received two months ago had only just healed, it was still too early for him to resist another Campione.

"Kranjcar. You were one of the miko[5] I gathered four years ago . Do you remember who showed the most outstanding talent back then?"

To summon a god, he had used his influence as a king to gather dozens of miko. When the ritual was over, two-thirds of them had lost their sanity, caused by the deep emotional trauma they had suffered.

Luckily, Liliana belonged to the third that had managed to stay safe.

"At that time, I found out that quality is more important than quantity. Rather than gathering riffraff, I should handpick the very best miko instead."

The emerald evil eyes pierced Liliana with amusement.

Like they had seen through her rebellious spirit.

"Unless I was mistaken, wasn't she Asian? You wouldn't happen to remember that girls name and lineage, would you?"

In this instant, Liliana hesitated.

Should she answer honestly or not? Considering the danger, it was of course the latter. But even if she successfully feigned ignorance here, he would just hear it later from another.

And as a proud knight, she should do the former.

She should brave this situation and deeply involve herself, then give her all to make sure that he produced no uninvolved victims. Following her characteristic sense of justice, Liliana resolved herself.

"Her name was Mariya. She is Japanese and said that she came from Tokyo. It may be insolent of me, but if you order it, I shall find her and bring her before you," she proposed while lowering her head. But the reply was unexpected.

"I've got an even better idea. I've thought about going to Japan myself. Hmm, now that I think about it, it's been a while since I've traveled the continents."

"You are a Campione, yet you will go in person?"

"I also want to breathe some foreign air once in a while. Isn't it fine? I am an old man with only a few years left that just wants to enjoy a transient vacation, yes?"

Mixing this declaration with his ghastly sense of humor, the devil king put a stop to the knight's objections.

"But having a companion is certainly useful. I order you to fill that role. Any objections?"

Even if she had objections, there was no way for her to express them.

While contently watching the compliant Liliana, Voban said:

"Then make preparations right away. You better not make me wait for a second too long."

"Understood. But, is it alright for me to say one thing first? One of your brethren is in Japan. Would it not be better to contact him ahead of time?"

Kusanagi Godou. The boy who had defeated the ancient Persian god of war Verethragna and became a Campione.

He had command over the ten incarnations that the war god could change into and had the crimson knight, who was Liliana's rival, wait upon him as his lover.

But the most senior devil king simply rejected this proposal with a scornful laugh.

"There's no need for that. If he has something to talk about, he can just come to me."

It was the whim of a devil king with far too much free time.

It would not be long before this developed into the turmoil that would swallow up Kusanagi Godou and Tokyo.

Chapter 1 - Every Day is a Bothersome Day

Part 1

Recently, Kusanagi Godou began setting off from home forty minutes earlier than usual.

He originally had a habit of getting up early for a run, but this was not the reason he had to move his schedule earlier. In fact, he could have just changed his morning run to the evenings.

It was nearing the end of June, and plum rain had continued every day in the monsoon season for at least half a month.

But today was a much awaited sunny day. Godou put on his light running shoes at the entrance and prepared to set off.

The last time he left home without needing an umbrella was many days ago. As his thoughts reached this point, a sudden greeting was heard from behind.

"Good morning, Onii-chan. You're quite early again today... Are you going to that person on the way again?"

A voice that should have been very cute to listen to, but currently had a strange threatening tone.

Turning his head back, Godou saw his younger sister Shizuka appearing at the doorway with a sneer.

"Every single morning, meeting the blonde lover at some place and then going to school together. I am surprised by your earnest diligence, Onii-chan."

"Ah... please don't misunderstand. Erica is not my lover or anything like that."

In response to her older brother's denial, the sister snorted with a sneer and ignored it.

"Aya, really? Onii-chan is two-timing Mariya-senpai and Erica-san at the same time. It really seems like... So who is the main wife and who is the backup? Or do they play both roles!"

"Don't blindly believe those strange rumors. You're talking as if I was the kind of man who made women his playthings!"

"It's like this, there's no smoke without fire. The gist is the female friend sleeps in every day, so each morning you have to go to that female friend's home to wake her up. Isn't that strange? Couldn't one just use an alarm clock to wake up?"

It really was exactly as Shizuka described it.

Godou nodded deeply, and at the same time, felt troubled as to how he could describe the peculiarities of the young lady Erica Blandelli.

It had already been a month since he began sharing the same classroom as Erica.

The only day she arrived at the classroom on time and before lessons began was the first.

Henceforth, she was late every single day. It was a good day if she arrived before homeroom ended.

In the most severe cases, she would casually stroll into the classroom after lessons had begun for an hour or two, and greet Godou as if nothing had happened—right in front of all the classmates and teachers.

"Good morning everyone. You're all early today as well... Aya, why is Godou's face so terrible, what happened? Aha, you must be unhappy that you weren't able to see my face until now. I also wanted to see the adorable you earlier, which is why I rushed here. But then it ended up being this late, is it acceptable?"

Completely shameless and speaking total rubbish, she approached Godou's side.

The stares from the rest of the class were painfully stabbing away at Godou.

(Especially the boys. If those glares were knives, then Godou would have been shredded into a thousand pieces by now.)

Godou made a decision as he tried to push away Erica who was leaning tightly against him. No sacrifice would be too great, if this woman would only come to school on time properly.

The result was, visiting Erica's room and going to school together became a daily routine.

...Perhaps, it is precisely because I am going to school together with that fellow that I am being misunderstood? This question had entered Godou's mind.

Shrugging off the jeering gaze of the sister who saw him off, Godou left the house.

Erica's new residence was a luxury apartment on Hongou Street, roughly five minutes of walking distance away. They lived on the tenth floor of a twelve-story 2LDK. [6]

As usual, Godou called using the intercom at the entrance.

"Yes, may I know who is it?"

"Good morning, Anna-san, it's me, Kusanagi."

"Ah, Godou-sama, thanks for your efforts every day, please enter."

The high pitched voice—bright, clear and outgoing—clearly conveyed the cheerfulness of the speaker through the intercom.

Passing through the door, Godou took the elevator up to the destination floor. To Godou, who had always lived in a simple detached house, it felt a little uncomfortable each time he entered

and exited the luxury apartment that was protected by a security system of automated locks.

Pressing the bell at the door to Erica's unit, the door immediately opened.

"Good morning, do please come in."

The one who came to receive him was Arianna Hayama Arialdi.

The apprentice mage at the "Copper Black Cross" magic association, as well as the assistant and personal caregiver (basically the maid) of the Templar Knight Erica Blandelli—the one who held the title Great Knight.

She was the servant in charge of all domestic chores in this apartment.

"Doesn't today's great weather make one so happy? Lately, due to the cloudy or rainy days, I have been feeling troubled by the laundry not drying."

Arianna gave a refreshing smile as she welcomed Godou inside.

A face that seemed younger than her nineteen years of age, and gave an impression of great cleverness and competence... However , the truth was much more unfortunate, for she is a classic case where "one cannot be judged by appearances."

"So Anna-san, has that fellow Erica woken up today?"

Godou hastily asked as he was brought to the living room.

Though he already knew Erica had no ability to get up by herself, Godou still tried to harbor some hope.

"Probably, I heard some noises just now from the direction of the bedroom. Ah, if you wish, would you like a Cappuccino while you are waiting? If you're hungry, perhaps you'd like a little soup from yesterday, if you don't mind."

Anna asked with a smile as cute as a lily.

A pure smile that warmed you from the heart. A girl who can smile like that surely cannot fall into misfortune.

As Godou thought to himself, he glanced into the distance at the pressure cooker sitting on the electric stove in the kitchen.

A bad feeling.

Perhaps a bias created by first impressions. But maybe noticing danger is a warning imparted by the instincts of a Campione. One should avoid danger as much as possible.

"I already had breakfast at home, so I'll pass on the soup."

A perfect answer.

Of course, at an age of a healthy appetite, Godou's stomach can surely handle a second breakfast without issue. However, the exception is a particular product of Anna's cooking.

...It was about a month ago, the first time visiting this room.

To serve Godou, the guest of her mistress Erica, Arianna had offered her personal cooking.

Handmade spaghetti with cream sauce, thinly sliced cheese and ham, bread with added sausage and vegetables, appetizers of fresh slices of raw fish and cold cuts—all of them tasted excellent, and were most satisfying. However, the exception was the final soup presented on a dish.

"I'm dieting currently, so I'll stop here."

Erica, who had been eating heartily mouthful by mouthful, suddenly put down her knife and fork.

Despite her slim figure, her appetite greatly exceeded a normal male.

Although it felt really suspicious, Godou could not find a reason to refuse this soup colored a strange shade of red, so he had taken a small sip.

All the adjectives of the Japanese language could "hardly describe it," so Godou gave up.

That's the kind of taste it was.

An indescribable taste. Simple adjectives of sour, sweet, bitter or spicy, etc, did not suffice, and one simply couldn't imagine what kind of ingredients went into making it.

Inevitably, Godou had shifted his gaze to Erica, who returned a malevolent smile.

(Didn't I mention it before, that one needs to be careful with Arianna's cooking?)

(If, if that's the case, then, at least give a warning.)

As she communicated with Godou by exchanging glances, Erica drank her after-meal Espresso with an air of nonchalance.

Remembering the lesson he had learnt, Godou accepted only the Cappuccino this morning.

Calming himself, Godou waited for Arianna to return from the master bedroom.

...But she came back immediately.

"Sorry, Godou-sama. Erica-sama only woke for a moment to say she had 'no mood to get up from bed without the kiss of the prince , and that Godou should have been brought here earlier...' "

Arianna seemed pitiful as she reported that Erica had gone back to sleep.

Godou furrowed his brow.

Of course, he never expected that girl to get up so simply. Even if he offered a morning call service from his home, that fellow would have simply hung up the phone on him.

Was there really no other way but to enter the room and wake her up?

"That fellow always creates a chore for others in the morning—"

Godou complained as he left the living room and intruded into Erica's bedroom.

The mistress of this home was peacefully sleeping away with light breathing noises, wrapped in the blanket on the bed.

"You really went back to sleep, didn't you..."

The room's interior condition gave Godou a shock as he entered .

Completely unlike the living space of a girl living in the 2010's, it was a room full of books and antiques.

Amidst paperbacks were popular magazines, as well as ancient books in English, Italian, Latin, Chinese and all sorts of different languages on the book shelves above. Though neither CD nor MP3 players were found, there was an extremely old record player.

They were arranged neatly, but surely it was not through the owner's efforts.

Most likely, it was Arianna who cleans up. As if to support this hypothesis, scattered all over the floor beneath the bed were the clothes probably taken off last night.

A t-shirt and shorts, as well as a few scraps of water-colored cloth—one piece, two pieces.

What is this combination of cloth?

Godou cannot imagine anything good out of it, and tells himself to stop paying attention to it as he neared the bed.

"Hey, Erica, you're going to be late if you don't get up. This is no good."

Godou shook the girl's body, trying to wake her.

Martial artists in certain swordsmen novels often possess the ability to wake up when approached in their sleep, but clearly this mage and genius swordswoman is devoid of this skill. She probably would explain it as "presumably because there was no change in killing intent."

"...Let me sleep a little longer. I was up till 4am last night watching Bruce Lee videos, and am still very sleepy. Please, I'll kiss you later, ok? Godou."

Erica said this without even opening her eyes.

This Italian girl surprisingly turned out to be a fan of the great kung fu star. To have studied these videos from that era to such a degree.

"No way. You shouldn't be watching those things when you have school, get up quickly. How about I watch the Die Hard trilogy with you on the weekend?"

"Bruce is not enough, you need to add Jet Li as well."

At least she was finally conscious, and greeted Godou hello.

"Jackie Chan and Chow Yun Fat together as well, get up, time for school."

"Yes, getting up right away, Godou sure is bad. You're probably the first boy who ever got me out of bed by force... Hey, I'm getting up, come give me a morning kiss..."

Getting up from bed was the only time when Erica lost her usually dominating and confident demeanor.

Like a child, speaking as if she wanted to be spoilt.

As Godou answered her while he pulled away the blanket wrapped around her—he froze completely. The pale white neck and the naked back were entirely revealed.

Due to sleeping with her back turned, it was fortunate that the front could not be seen.

However, because the curvaceous body part—whose lines from the waist to the buttocks are like an artistic drawing—was going to be revealed, Godou frantically covered her once again with the blanket.

"E-Erica... You, you're not properly dressed?"

"I did wear clothes. I don't sleep nude you know, it's just that around the time of dawn I couldn't go back to sleep so I took them off... No problem, I did put on perfume... Just like that actress from before—"

Erica got up all of a sudden.

At the same time, the blanket began to slide off the clearly unclothed upper torso, and her bountiful cleavage was revealed from below.

Godou immediately caught the falling blanket.

"Erica, put on some clothes! Please! Please put on your clothes first!"

"Yes—then, first let's wear... the underwear in the second drawer from the bottom, Godou can pick whichever ones you prefer..."

To Godou who just heard a terrifying sentence, Erica smiled faintly.

A different smile from the usual devil's smile, it was a true and innocent smile. Perhaps because she had just risen from bed, the crafty witch was acting a little more honest.

Frightened by this fresh feeling, Godou continued to beg.

"Don't joke around, choose it yourself!"

"Still lacking in ambition eh? Ah, help me take out the ones I was wearing yesterday, did they fall on the ground?"

"Those are underwear. Is it really ok to leave them somewhere that men can see?"

"It's fine if it's Godou, for you are special. Even seeing my naked body is totally fine for you."

"No way, that is completely out of the question. An-anna-san, please could you bring something for Erica to wear? Please, quickly!"

To Erica's words which made Godou panic, Arianna calmly smiled and ran over.

Godou's recent mornings pretty much all felt like this.

Part 2

The high school division of Jounan Academy, Year 1, Class 5.

Here was the classroom of Erica and Godou, and by the way, the two were neighbors.

Actually Erica was originally seated much further away, but on the first day she transferred, she suddenly gave that speech.

A month ago, during homeroom in the morning.

The foreign student from Italy had introduced herself with perfect Japanese.

Afterwards, Erica, who had been seated next to a window, began smiling as she hummed proudly to herself. Then she proceeded to casually walk to Godou's seat and suddenly announced.

"First of all I must make this clear, I, Erica Blandelli have already promised my future to someone, and that is this person, Kusanagi Godou. —hoho, from today onwards we will always be together, Godou."

As she delivered those words, she deftly embraced Godou who desperately wanted to flee, and kissed him upon the cheek.

Elegantly capturing Godou who had been on alert—this must surely count as a miraculous skill—Erica then began to give a speech.

Two people in love, who cannot be separated even for a moment.

And so she hoped for cooperation to obtain her rightful seat belonging by his side.

"There can be no place for me to sit except beside Kusanagi Godou. Would you help us who are in love, and accept such willfulness?"

Godou was shocked that Erica made such a request.

No, no matter how you look at it, that is totally unreasonable. One was truly speechless at this choice of action.

The surrounding classmates all suddenly left their seats, and started to reorganize themselves to accommodate Erica's seating request. Even the teacher had nothing to say.

At that time, Erica must have been using magic similar to hypnosis.

And so it came to be, the two of them were seated next to each other, and their relationship was officially recognized within the class.

"Hey Godou, let's go for lunch, Arianna prepared sandwiches for me today."

Erica joyfully said as the bell rang for the lunch break. Godou immediately began to feel his body being pierced by vast amounts of murderous intent.

—It's that guy Kusanagi again, we see this every single day!

—Ch! Our Erica, why would she go with that guy!

—If this level of hate can become a murder weapon, I, I will be able to kill this guy!

—You boy, even hell is too mild for you!

"Hey! Erica, why don't you try having lunch with other girls for once? I will go to the school cafeteria."

Pressured by the indescribable stress, Godou attempted to offer a suggestion.

The dark aura exuded by the surrounding boys has been intensifying through each passing day.

Jealousy, hate, revulsion, murderous intent, enmity. If a measuring device existed to quantify these negative emotions, who knew what values would be recorded in this classroom?

"What are you talking about? Even for the girls, everybody supports us. Don't ruin the mood with such words."

Godou sighed at Erica's simple response.

Erica Blandelli's political and negotiation skills can truly be horrifying.

She was definitely not a person with a good attitude at receiving others. In fact, the first time she met Godou, she was mostly arrogant and cold.

However, as long as she willed it, she can be a diplomatic expert who gets along well with anyone.

She possessed beauty and elegance beyond the daughters of high class families, extraordinary eloquence of speech, social strategy which neither compromised nor created conflict, first

impressions convincing others that she was a special existence, and exceptional charisma fitting for a leader.

If a person of such a disposition were to get serious, no high school student in Japan would be her match.

Even when her character is so prone to doing as she pleased, Erica's actions have not garnered any ill talk behind her back. Godou truly admired this accomplishment.

The trouble was this—Erica's total disregard for hiding her affections towards a specific boy was greatly problematic.

Due to the well wishes of the girls, as well as the anger of the boys, hate and admiration had combined to double the pressure on Godou.

"But then, it would be nice to have lunch outside once in a while . Since today's weather is fine, how about the central courtyard? To go to the benches there, wouldn't that be great?"

"Sorry, only that choice is impossible, let's eat in the classroom."

Godou immediately answered to the smiling Erica.

The central courtyard was where not only high school students but many middle schoolers passed by, especially during the lunch break. One must avoid such attention seeking actions at all costs in a place seen by so many people.

"Then how about as usual, I'll go buy the drinks, what do you want?"

"Tea then, the non-sweet type."

Alternating between buying drinks and bread was the agreement they had decided beforehand.

As Erica left to fulfill her turn to buy drinks, Godou began to prepare the area for lunch.

Laying out the napkin and placing the lunchbox on it, there were Italian cold cuts, sandwiches containing ham and vegetables, as well as olives in plastic containers, apples, etc.

A lunch prepared by Arianna, full of European style.

Recalling the first time when Erica just moved here, the memory remains fresh in Godou's mind when he lectured Erica for planning on bringing wine and champagne bought from the hotel as drinks for lunch.

"What's the matter, Takagi?"

Since the boy who sat behind him seemed to be saying something, Godou ventured to ask.

Godou was already quite tall, but Takagi was taller still, reaching nearly 185cm in height. He should be in the Kendo club.

"Godou, let me share with you some good news. Right now, all the boys of our Class 5 are enduring the accumulation of rage and hate towards your atrocious acts, as if ignoring our existence..."

"I'm sorry, but the one ignoring others is Erica, not me."

"Ch! Whenever you talk about yourself, you always think you are in the right! You think you're so special—fine, if you're going to be that way, we will take emergency measures."

Takagi spoke decisively.

Why? He—no, including him, all the boys staring at Godou had their eyes full of strong determination, it's almost like those of two boxers in an undecided match, dodging each other's attacks and waiting for an opportunity to counterattack.

"Emergency... measures?"

"Yes. We will fight poison with poison. If you won't heed the feelings of us men, then we will retaliate with the appropriate measures! ...To be frank, we already sent someone to report to the other class next door."

"Why the class next door... Could it be!?"

"Ho, you realized it. But it's too late. We tried to avoid this until now because it hurts us too. But in order to torment you, we dare to walk the path of pain."

As Takagi gave a speech full of heroic sacrifice, she arrived.

Mariya Yuri of the First Year, Sixth Class.

Godou's sister Shizuka's upperclassman at the tea ceremony club she belonged to, the one who represented the Japanese

wizardry world, and the Hime-Miko whose appearance never failed to catch Godou's attention. As she entered the door to Class 5, Godou found her walking over to him.

"Kusanagi-san, may I borrow a moment of your time?"

"Yes, yes, what is it?"

The number one top beauty in the school alongside Erica, was asking with a sharp glare.

Her beauty was like sakura flowers blossoming quietly on the mountain side, and felt neither arrogant nor ostentatious.

One could easily fall into obsession just by watching her.

"I am reminding you precisely because this is inappropriate. I am in a different class, and cannot report you to the discipline committee... However, the students in this class only hope you will not ignore them."

"Uh, umm..."

In front of Yuri who spoke persuasively with reason, Godou had a face full of panic. This beautiful miko-sama was truly hard to handle. Once she started lecturing, one would inevitably start listening respectfully.

"I heard that every day during lunch, Kusanagi-san and Erica-san are doing that... is... is it called flirting? Speaking intimate words lacking in caution. This is a school, don't you think you should save those for a more appropriate time and place?"

"We weren't flirting! Only having lunch together!"

"Obviously lying. Due to this, Class 5 is so troubled that they are almost crying... The one with me just now mentioned it. Something like 'Kusanagi is treating all the boys who don't have girlfriends as fools by flirting with Erica every day. We must all be concerned, and so forth.' And spoken tearfully too."

Behind Yuri, who was lecturing with righteous anger, were...

The boys in the class, all of them watching the cornered Godou with malevolent smiles. Those evil expressions fully betrayed their feelings.

—Hehehe, as expected, Godou cannot defy Mariya.

—But then, to be tricked by that awful acting, and to come to this classroom specifically, isn't Mariya coming personally for Godou after all?

—Damn! Unacceptable! Why do such good things only happen to that guy?

—How enviable. I also want to get to know the Mariya-san " who has no interest in boys" and be lectured by her.

—Oh! Look, Erica is back, let the show really begin.

"Ah, it's Yuri? It's rare to see you here during lunch?"

Holding drink cartons of oolong tea and orange juice, Erica had returned to the classroom.

"You want to join us for lunch? As long as you don't disturb Godou and my fun, you're welcomed."

"Unfortunately, the reason I am here is to obstruct you two."

Erica and Yuri silently faced off with strong determination.

These two are truly incompatible in personality. Whenever Godou was getting teased by Erica, Yuri always expressed disapproval if she happened to witness it.

Ever since the first time they met, the same type of situation had unfolded countless times.

The problem was that this mostly happened in school, in full view of a substantial number of the high school and middle school students.

"Ohoh, it's the battle between the mistress and the wife." "It must be time for Godou to confess his sins." "Kusanagi that fellow, when did he start getting so close to Mariya?" "Idiot, the two of them must be childhood friends." "Is that so? So because Mariya failed to recognize her feelings for Kusanagi, the result was the intrusion of Erica from Italy!?" "Choosing between the Japanese legal wife Mariya, and the Italian mistress Erica, what an ultimate dilemma!"

Sigh, the cause of this misunderstanding has its reasons.

Perhaps due to nationality, most people would think that Yuri and Godou knew each other first. However, the truth was the opposite, but jumping to conclusions could be a scary thing.

"...This feels a bit noisy."

"You still don't seem to understand what I am saying, why don't we change locations? To the roof then, a less conspicuous location."

Noticing the people around Yuri discussing all sorts of theories excitedly, Godou made a proposition.

It was already impossible to converse in such an environment, and Godou gave Erica a look. Truly expected of a comrade, she immediately understood and neatly wrapped up the food on the table.

Godou took the hand of the miko-sama who seemed to be in a trance, and walked towards the classroom exit.

"Ah?" While Yuri realized with surprise she was being led walking by the hand, Erica had caught up.

—Recently, trying to eat lunch casually has become impossible.

Godou complained in his mind as he bolted out of the classroom like an advanced attack party.

Part 3

It was quite chaotic on the roof during lunch.

A few people were eating lunch in groups, while others were playing ball. It was rather lively.

Unlike the classroom, Godou and his group would not attract attention here.

"Should have come here from the start, finally some peace and quiet."

"If it's just two people eating lunch normally, then it could be quiet anywhere, do not blame the reason on others."

Yuri continued to oppose vehemently to Godou who had made the correct choice in location.

She had also picked up her own lunchbox along the way when they passed by the 6th Class.

"Today's weather is great, and being outside makes one feel at ease. Isn't this nice?"

Erica began to eat her sandwiches while speaking indifferently.

By the way, Arianna had prepared equal portions for both Erica and Godou. Incommensurate with her slim figure, Erica's appetite was extreme.

"...So, how do Kusanagi-san and Erica-san usually eat lunch?"

Yuri's lunchbox, on the other hand, was a normal girl's portion.

As to her holding of the chopsticks, they were used in a most elegant manner. Perhaps she was well taught from a young age.

"Usually I am being hassled by Erica while being talked about by others."

"What hassling... Really, there are mountains worth of boys who want to eat lunch with me."

To Erica who sighed as she spoke, Godou was staring at her with eyes of resentment.

In reality, to this date, there had been quite a few people who tried to intrude in between the two of them. However, every time they were driven away by Erica who always guessed their intentions.

... Since she was a girl, they could not lose their temper and scold her.

In these areas, Erica was completely flawless.

Towards boys, she was entirely merciless. With an elegant smile she would say "You're in the way, could you please leave?"

"If you already know you're popular, could you stop that Queen-like attitude? If you continue to do as you please, I have to take the brunt of the backlash."

Even though Godou was very displeased, Erica only smiled in a relaxed manner.

"Isn't that great? To be the exclusive recipient of my love. Aren't there many benefits?"

"...Sometimes I really admire this self-confidence of yours."

"If you could respond decisively, Kusanagi-san, I don't believe it would have progressed to this. First and foremost, one must always do things with determination."

Yuri's voice was filled with thorns of disapproval.

"Ah, yes." Without realizing it, Godou began to retreat.

Perhaps it was due to her pointing out the truth, Godou felt like he cannot give a rebuttal. It was completely unlike those times when he argued with Erica.

"Ah, yes, Godou. That matter, isn't it time for it to be determined whether it is accepted or not? The exact time will be today after school."

"That matter... is it something that can be brought home?"

Erica suddenly brought up something that immediately caused Godou agitation.

Not long after Erica had transferred, she immediately made the request of meeting and greeting Godou's family.

"In that case, didn't we talk about it already, so you still haven't given up?"

"Of course. In preparation for the future, winning over Godou's family is a necessary prerequisite."

Looks like joyfully talking about her deep scheming was one of Erica's most adept skills.

To this exchange of words, Yuri frowned in a barely perceptible manner.

"Shizuka-san seems to have heard about Erica-san, and is most wary in a serious state of alert. When this kind of female approaches her brother, it is only natural."

The younger sister Shizuka was a 3rd year student in the middle school division.

Since the relationship with the blonde beauty had become the gossip of the school, their relationship was already known. For the sake of harmony within the family, Godou had wanted to prevent this meeting.

"Come on, visiting my home isn't that fun anyway?"

"Even if it's not very fun, meeting the family of my lover, and having our relationship recognized officially is very important."

To Erica's suggestion, Godou immediately rebuffed.

"We are not lovers, and there is no need for official recognition!"

"Then there's no other way. Imouto-san is also in this school, right? 3rd Year 2nd Class of the middle school, her register

number is 9. Her seat is the second one in the row closest to the corridor."

Unlike the innocent child this morning, this was the true horrifying face of the witch.

A smile appeared at the corner of Erica's lip, completely expressing her malevolent intentions. Dominating Godou, causing him to admit defeat from the depths of his heart.

"The grandfather who retired 6 years ago from the university position of professor of folklore studies. Living carefree nowadays and taking up all the chores of the household. The mother works at Yushima."

"Why do you know so much detail about my family?"

"Since Godou did not introduce them to me, I decided to investigate a bit. To suddenly visit and meet them would be quite strange, so I have been waiting for you to invite me... However, there are times when one must take action for oneself."

Cornered by Erica, Godou only had two choices.

To let Erica introduce herself in a situation when Godou himself was absent, or to bring Erica to the house, and face the family together. Which would it be? That was the question.

"Sigh, I still can't think of a better solution..."

Godou was becoming further agitated. Was there a less risky option—?

Certain of her victory, Erica was chuckling proudly to herself. Was there really no trump card to reverse defeat—yes, there was a way.

Right here beside them, was another girl.

Godou looked at her frowning face full of propriety.

"Mariya, would you happen to be free today after school? If it's convenient, could you come visit my home? Along with this girl—Erica."

Godou tried to ask with total sincerity.

Yuri stared at Godou with a lost expression.

"For m-me to visit your... home, Kusanagi-san?"

"Yes. If I bring Erica to my home, I cannot restrain her by myself . If it's possible, could you help keep an eye over her—"

"I see... In that case, I do not mind."

Yuri nodded as she glanced at Erica.

"Indeed, Kusanagi-san, letting your family meet Erica-san would probably be a dangerous matter. A sudden visit to a boy's home is a little unusual. But given that is the situation, it cannot be helped. I have no choice but to accept."

"Thank you, Mariya... You won't mind, right, Erica?"

Counterattack success! Godou returned a smile of victory.

Erica seemed slightly impressed. She smiled and nodded.

"Godou... Do you really think your little trick can stop me? Do not underestimate this [Diavolo Rosso] so easily."

"Hmph. I won't do as you wish forever, be prepared for that."

At that time, Godou still had not realized he was digging his own grave.

Part 4

Uh, did he do something wrong?

Watching the delicate expressions on Shizuka's face, Godou felt troubled.

If it was just himself, he definitely would not be able to control Erica. With Yuri's help however, there should be a way.

—Then what was the matter with this bad feeling?

After school, Godou and Erica, as well as Yuri walked back to the Kusanagi residence.

Walking for roughly ten minutes from Jounan Academy, they reached the shopping street in Nezu of the Bunkyo ward.

In that area was a closed down Japanese book store and the home of the Kusanagi family. Godou led the two girls into the living room.

"You're home, Onii-chan. Yes, listen to me. Grandfather said that tonight's dinner is hand-rolled sushi—Anyway... let's go shopping together..."

They were greeted by Grandfather Kusanagi Ichirou and Shizuka who had already returned from school.

After half a day, her mood seemed to have improved, and the younger sister's speech had become more relaxed—however, her state was rapidly deteriorating mid-sentence.

The grandfather calmly smiled at the two girls his grandson brought home.

"Ah... what should I say, you even brought some friends."

"Yes, all sorts of friends..."

As she finished speaking, Shizuka finally greeted Yuri as her senior in the club activities.

"Hello, Mariya-senpai. And that one over there must be Erica-san who has a close relationship with Onii-chan? I already know... from rumors."

"Hello Shizuka. Haven't I introduced myself on the phone before? A pleasure to meet you, grandfather. I apologize for my

sudden intrusion today. There are things I must talk to Godou's family about, if I may?"

Erica greeted them with a most lady-like smile.

When she acted like that, one cannot help but marvel at what a perfect high class lady she was.

"Hoho... Let's take your seats first, I will prepare the tea."

And so, everyone came into the living room of the Kusanagi family.

Around the large table sat Godou with Erica on his right and Yuri on the left. Opposite was Shizuka with an intense glare, while the cheerful grandfather sat on the side.

Somehow it evolved into an awkward atmosphere along the likes of "hopeless, you rascal." Why was that?

Grandfather suddenly addressed Yuri.

Perhaps it was because Yuri spoke less than Erica, so he became a bit curious.

"Yes, I am Mariya. My utmost apologies for today's sudden intrusion. Shizuka-san and I both belong to the same tea ceremony club."

"Then that means you're Shizuka's senior, right? Did you become friends with Godou due to Shizuka?"

Grandfather nodded at Yuri's earnest greeting and thoughtlessly asked.

However, the one who answered this loaded question was Shizuka.

"That has no relation to me whatsoever. Onii-chan and Mariya-senpai's relationship suddenly became close at some unknown point in time, and they even met secretly behind my back during weekends."

Godou began to realize the mistake he had made.

Although the overall strategy was correct in bringing Yuri as an ally, the unexpected result was greatly increasing the battle spirit of the adversary (the younger sister).

However... it was still too early to write it off as a failure.

With his will to fight rising, his targets have also increased to two. However, if the will to battle has increased, but the targets have doubled, then it will still be tough to handle.

"When did Onii-chan and Erica-san meet is also a mystery as well. When we talked on the phone last time, no one would have thought she was foreign due to her excellent Japanese. Onii-chan and Erica-san's relationship seems to be extremely close? It's already the talk of the school."

Shizuka also began to direct her enmity towards Erica, and started a two pronged attack.

Now was the key moment, and Godou immediately responded.

"In truth, Erica should be the one closer to me, but that's it. Even for Shizuka, you must have many close friends, right?"

"Yes, I have many friends. However, I have never had a friend who made an engagement-like declaration on the first day of transferring into the school."

Shizuka rebuked her brother's question flawlessly with another reference to Erica.

It would be necessary for evidence to be provided by this blonde witch in order to prove his innocence. Godou made a decision as he waited for her to speak.

...Erica showed what seemed like a smile of pity.

As if boasting she can win as a challenge, Godou suddenly felt very displeased.

"I am very sorry that the matter of Godou and I has created such kind of rumor."

"There is no credibility coming from the person who created the rumor. Isn't the one who forced me into all this trouble you yourself, Erica?"

"Don't, don't say it like that... there was no forcing at all."

Erica swiftly held out her hand.

By the time he realized it was no good, it was already too late—Godou's right hand on the table had been clasped by Erica's right hand.

It wasn't exactly fast.

Rather, it was a slow, elegant motion. However, Godou still wasn't able to evade.

...When one skilled with swords chops down with a shinai (bamboo blade), even a fierce warrior will not be able to escape. This is truly one of Erica's amazing skills.

"Anyway, about that, why don't you answer properly, Godou. You're just not being forthcoming enough. But then again, this is one of your cute points."

Shizuka's gaze was beginning to look as if it was colder than freezing temperature.

The obvious reason was the pair of hands which appeared to be harmoniously holding each other.

"No, it's not like that. Do not misunderstand. It is Erica's brute force which is holding my hand down."

"Onii-chan is the worst! Your denials are futile."

Godou was trying with all his strength to extract his hand from Erica's grip.

However, this blonde devil easily suppressed it with a relaxed expression upon her face. Not only that, she was acting as if lovingly caressing Godou's hand, trying to intertwine their fingers intimately together.

Godou truly hated the magic which granted this woman such demonic strength.

What if he tried to stand up with all his might, would he be able to escape from such a skill?

No, he would not.

There was one time when he had been in a similar situation. He ended up losing balance, falling to the ground, only to be hypnotized and played around with. At times like these, this witch only knew how to press her advantages to the limit and pose with perfect victory.

"Erica-san, please have some restraint with your pranks!"

Godou felt relieved from the loud cry which echoed. Truly, bringing her here was the right decision.

"Shizuka-san and grandfather, please allow me to explain the situation. Perhaps you may find it completely unbelievable and a pack of lies to cover up the truth. However, Erica-san and Kusanagi-san are not in a boyfriend girlfriend relationship."

Yuri's voice was awe-inspiring, and truly reliable.

Sounding like the clear pure tone of a bell, even Shizuka began to focus her attention on her senior's face.

"Before, Kusanagi-san has sworn in front of me—that he definitely is not going out with Erica-san. Should this oath be false, he will gladly submit to death without a word of objection. I, at that time did believe that Kusanagi-san was not lying. No, I wanted to believe."

...It was a month ago, the night Athena was defeated and repelled.

In order to convince Yuri who insisted that Godou and Erica terminate their unhealthy—no, lover's relationship. Godou had come up with this solution, and even swore an oath with his life as forfeit.

The result was, at the very least Yuri acknowledged Godou's opinion.

"Admittedly, these two people have a very unhealthy relationship, and it is completely unacceptable. However, it is due to Erica-san's despicable attempts at seduction, that Kusanagi-san has been hassled to within an inch of his life."

Yuri's defense continued. Eh? Does this still count as defending?

"To be honest, this person really tries hard, but always seems to be doing inexplicable things, and never considers the trouble he brings to others around him. He is hopeless, and a person who doesn't know how to lie. One would hope that he would strive to

keep his promises, but the end result is he fails the majority of the time."

Erica on the other side, was silently laughing away.

Since her grip had relaxed, Godou hurriedly withdrew his right hand. But why? There was no feeling that crisis had been averted at all.

"If he cannot prudently reject Erica-san's advances, then Kusanagi-san should show more determination in his contact with Erica-san. Waking her up every morning is spoiling her, and leaning your bodies close to each other, to be honest it is totally an eyesore. Though you have completely failed on all accounts, I believe you are innocent, even if it is not my intention."

At that moment, Godou finally realized the error he had committed.

Asking for reinforcements was correct. But this was Yuri, who always spoke truthfully without any knowledge of tact. Was she an appropriate ally in such a situation? The answer laid there.

"How is it? Kusanagi-san and Erica-san are not going out, can everyone understand?"

To Yuri's sincere gaze of questioning, Shizuka nodded her head.

And turned her gaze, full of despise and mockery, at her brother.

"Yes, hearing this explanation clears up the gist of these two's relationship. But I still don't understand the situation deep enough ."

Godou and Erica, as well as Yuri, gazed at Shizuka as she spoke .

"But, let's get to the bottom of this, why would my idiot Onii-chan need to swear such an oath to Mariya-senpai? What kind of relationship does Mariya-senpai have with Onii-chan?"

"Eh? Just ordinary friends. This and that—"

How could it be explained that one was the god-slaying Devil King and the other was the Hime-Miko representing the Japanese magic world?

To the honest Yuri, letting her improvise a cover up was very difficult.

"From the words just now, it's almost like the wife is a childhood friend. Legal wife and lover, it looks like the rumors are true. Onii-chan, well done, doesn't this feel just like Grandfather and deceased Grandmother back then, what a great atmosphere?"

"Eh!? What are you talking about, Shizuka-san?"

Don't treat me as the same type as Grandfather, I'm begging you...

Shizuka's words, full of subtle meanings, caused Yuri to lose her composure. Godou frowned.

No matter what, he didn't want to be compared with Grandfather.

"Grandfather and Grandmother? What was that like?"

Piqued with interest, Erica's inquiry caused Shizuka to sigh deeply.

"In all generations of the Kusanagi family, all the men have idle hands. Examples include playboy heirs who wrecked their inheritances amusing themselves with geisha, and had illegitimate children popping up out of the woodwork after their deaths. It's been over 200 years, but there really have been all sorts."

Shizuka glanced at her Grandfather who was sipping tea in small mouthfuls.

Without saying a single word for the past while, and sitting as still as air, the grandfather Kusanagi Ichirou, returned his granddaughter's gaze with a gentle smile.

"Hahaha, Shizuka. I don't quite agree with what you say about all the ancestors, but then again, not all of it is completely wrong."

"From the same bloodline, the only recent one with rare capability was Grandfather. But Grandfather was not only a playboy but there were many women who approached uninvited. Grandma sure had a tough time sweeping those pests away."

To his granddaughter's accusations, the Grandfather smiled and shook his head.

"Though I socialized with all sorts of women in my youth, but my heart was true to my wife after we married."

"I'm innocent! In general, I am totally unlike Grandfather. Personality is also completely different!"

Shizuka shrugged and ignored Godou's protest.

Furthermore, Yuri seemed to agree with this grandfather-grandson comparison and said something like 'now that you say it, it does...', even Erica seemed to be nodding her head impressed.

Sigh, such situations made one feel that the face is truly more important than the personality sometimes.

"True, the personalities are different, but the end result of their actions are both 'extremely alike.' I heard that others regarded Grandfather as a very serious person in his youth, but isn't it the same for Onii-chan?"

Reflecting on himself, Godou could not argue any more.

During the past spring of this year, defeating the god of war Verethragna on the southern Italian island of Sardinia.

This ancient Persian deity had ten characteristic forms—Wind, Bull, White Stallion, Camel, Boar, Youth, Raptor, Ram, Goat, as well as the Warrior.

Godou, who defeated Verethragna, had no intention of obtaining those powers. From then onwards, in the battles with gods and devil kings, Godou had damaged many world heritage sites.

This body was definitely unreasonable.

"Then, may I interrupt here? It's about time for dinner to be prepared. I've already readied the vinegar for tonight's hand rolled sushi."

Grandfather suddenly stood up.

Probably in order to break up the current silence.

"Just a while ago I called Sakuraba-san at the fish shop and asked him to choose some good ingredients. Why don't Godou and Shizuka go pick them up. Aya, don't forget to increase the portions for two additional people."

Grandfather spoke as he turned to smile most affectionately at Erica and Yuri.

"I hope you both don't mind staying for dinner? After all it is a rare occasion. Of course, if you have curfews or other engagements , I won't force you."

"No, Grandfather. Please let me stay no matter what."

Erica elegantly gave a bow from the side.

Seeing the two of them interact and turning out to be surprisingly compatible, Godou felt impressed. Erica and Grandfather are both people with perfect social skills.

However, Yuri on the left side—

"I, I intruded so suddenly. If I stayed for dinner, it would be troublesome right..."

"Not at all, Grandfather loves these kinds of situations. Gathering lots of people to savor his cooking, and have a good drink."

To dispel Yuri's hesitation, Godou explained to her.

However, she felt there was a problem with this invitation. Yuri was extremely surprised by the last sentence.

"Ah, ah, drink!?"

"Ah... You planned to drink today all along, right, Grandfather?
"

"Is there a problem? Godou and I are definitely fine. I'm sure Erica-san won't have a problem either—"

This is the old man whose poor role model included gradually indoctrinating his middle school grandchildren with the taste of

alcohol, then pretended to explain it as an early lesson "to prevent binge drinking and alcohol poisoning."

Seeing Erica's eyes flash, Godou immediately yelled out.

"Please, let's not drink tonight. Letting Erica imbibe alcohol would be catastrophic."

"Aya, Godou, the right amount of alcohol has benefits to both health and friendship."

"Wait a minute, Onii-chan, what exactly do you mean from what you just said? You're implying that you two drank alcohol together before! Please explain with details!"

"That, that's right. Kusanagi-san, please explain what transpired ."

The foolish comment was equivalent to adding new fuel to the fire.

As for the grandfather, he turned to his grandson in crisis and forced a faint smile. Godou felt that expression seemed to be saying "you still have much to learn."

Part 5

"Thanks for having me today. Please relay my regards to everyone."

"I'm sorry, Mariya, for forcing you to come along and making you stay this late."

It was already past eight o'clock at night by the time Yuri was setting off from the Kusanagi home.

Apologizing as he greeted her farewell at the entrance, Godou was seeing her off with a face full of shame and regret.

"No, I was happy. Please don't say that."

"Really, then that's good. See you tomorrow."

"Yes, see you tomorrow. I take my leave."

Nodding towards each other with the smiling Godou, Yuri bowed her head seriously and walked out of the entrance way.

In the end, they had dinner after talking with Shizuka. With his eyes, Godou ordered Erica not to drink, and they chatted as they ate.

To Yuri who had few friends, passing time like this was extremely rare.

Her overly serious way of speaking and elegant mannerisms were already uncommon, and basically she was never invited to go out and have fun by her peers.

She wasn't being shunned, but people just didn't want to be too conspicuous. A little unfamiliar.

Since she herself was aware of it, she never tried to involve herself in those circles either.

Just now during dinner, the one who spoke the least was Yuri.

But still, it felt pretty good.

Erica had the most to say, not only to Godou, but also with his grandfather and sister. Sometimes she even spoke a few sentences to Yuri.

Those sentences did not carry any domineering attitude, and was considerate of the other's rhythm of speech, allowing her to enjoy conversation in a relaxed manner.

As for Godou who wasn't talkative to begin with, he concentrated on eating instead of listening to them chat.

The only young man there, Godou's appetite was ravenous. However, he still entered the conversation during opportune moments between moving his chopsticks and wolfing down his food.

As a member of the same club, Shizuka also understood Yuri's personality to a certain extent.

The main host, Grandfather Kusanagi was a very observant person, which was consistent with his popularity with girls in his youth.

"Ah, Yuri-san. Seeing you is great, I've been trying to find you for quite a while. I beg you, please carry your cellphone with you, there are times there are emergencies when contact is needed."

As Yuri made her way through the street of shops toward the closest Nezu station, she was suddenly greeted by a voice.

This voice belonged to the young man dressed in a suit—Amakasu Touma.

The representative of the History Compilation Committee, an organization responsible for regulating the Japanese wizards and controlling information about gods and supernatural oddities.

"Cellphone? I am sorry but I do not think I need such a thing. However, how did you know I was here?"

To Yuri's question. Amakasu replied with an awkward smile.

"I came here by chance. As I was wondering if I would be able to find Yuri-san before you took the train, I waited here for a bit. When I called your home, they told me you had visited a fellow student's home near the school."

"Is that so... Anyway, what business do you have with me today ?"

So that meant, it was because she borrowed the phone at the Kusanagi residence to call home and tell them she would be late.

Yuri asked once she understood.

"Actually there's a request for you. However, today is a bit late, so we'll make the request tomorrow."

"Not a problem. If it is all right with you, let us finish it now?"

"No. It is something that needs to be discussed at a better location. Let's make it tomorrow. To Yuri-san this should be a relaxing task. A grimoire has been rumored to have appeared in Romania near the outskirts of Croatia, so we wish for Yuri-san to help certify its authenticity."

To Amakasu who spoke rather frivolously, Yuri sighed.

"Amakasu-san, my spirit vision is not some convenient power that can 'see' everything. There are many occasions when nothing is revealed."

This mouth must be one of the reasons he has so few friends.

Yuri thought to herself as she chastised how lightly this History Compilation Committee member was taking things.

The so-called spirit vision was definitely not an all-seeing power of analysis. It was just a kind of ability bestowed by the gods on a whim like an oracle.

"Then you are too humble. Even in Milan, the origin of magic in Eastern Europe, there are no spirit vision users whose capability exceeds Yuri-san. If you can't do it, then no one else can. Hope we can cooperate, if you don't mind too much."

Amakasu began to laugh.

At that point it was useless to say any more. Yuri decided to accept Amakasu's request, especially since there were few reasons to refuse a request made in such a manner.

"Fine, I understand. I will assist you tomorrow after school."

"Your help is appreciated. By the way, when you said you were visiting a friend near school, could it be the home of Kusanagi Godou?"

Abruptly, Amakasu changed the subject.

Do people deeply involved with magic and the gods have to be wary of contact with the Campione?

"Yes... Umm, is there any problem with that? I do not believe there is any need to deliberately distance myself from Kusanagi-san."

To this answer, Amakasu shook his head.

"Oh, no problem at all. Actually, it's the opposite. Yuri is one of Kusanagi Godou's most important friends, right? Take more initiative, go to his house, or even invite him over to yours, it's all good, keep it up."

"Is that so? ...Amakasu-san, things seem to have become a little unusual?"

Yuri became a little angry as she stared at the suspicious person in front of her.

A strange premonition flowed into her heart. Unease, as well as a sudden sense of accomplishment. Could this be some kind of prediction brought about by the power of spirit vision?

"Anyway, let's talk about this in detail tomorrow. Take care... during this wonderful evening."

Waving his hand, Amakasu departed.

Chapter 2 - Calm Before the Storm

Part 1

In the high school section of Jounan Academy, the boys and girls had gym class separately.

Students from the same grade were mixed together but segregated by gender. Godou's 5th Class was placed with the 6th Class.

Today, the boys' lesson was baseball.

The girls were doing softball, but since it was being carried out alongside the boys, they used the same field. Hence, it was a rare occasion when both the boys and girls of the 5th and 6th Classes had gym lessons together in the same location.

—The boy from the 6th Class pitched the baseball from the mound.

The ball failed to reach the catcher's glove, but instead flew between the right and center fielders as the blonde batter swung rapidly.

As the outfielder returned the ball, the batter had already reached third base splendidly.

Lessons within the school were only for beginners. In terms of level, they were even worse than amateur leagues, so any active performance here was nothing to be proud of.

This person obtained four hits with four turns at bat, and as pitcher struck out all the batters of the opposing team.

Mixed among the boys, the only active participant was Erica Blandelli who was totally amazing despite being a girl without a doubt.

Swinging her bat with splendor and the same ease as her sword.

"Godou! I want to pitch an even faster ball, you have to catch it! If it's Godou, you definitely can catch it!"

"Don't be stupid! We're not even on the same team!"

As the teams switched roles at the half-inning, Erica spoke nonsense at the pitcher's mound. Godou, whose own match had already ended, sat down to watch and coldly replied.

Starting a short while ago, Erica's fast balls began to slip from the catcher's glove.

It was to be expected. To demand a beginner catcher to receive that kind of fast ball was very unreasonable.

"The girls have one person extra, so may I join the boys? Of course, I won't let any of you boys flee from competing against me, how's that?"

The situation was created by Erica's proposal not long after class started.

Erica Blandelli's athletic prowess was already well known throughout the school.

Since her capability was fully acknowledged by the boys in the class, and even the gym teacher, she was placed into the A team of the 5th Class.

From that moment, the nightmare began to crush the boys' self-esteem.

When Erica pitched. Strikes were usually called. At best, the batter might hit an infield grounder.

When Erica pitched. The catcher would get hurt because the balls were too fast.

When Erica batted. Singles. Doubles. Triples. Home runs.

Those situations repeated themselves as if being copy and pasted. Not long after that, even the girls, who were having a softball match, stopped to gather round and watch Erica's performance.

Every time the blonde young lady gave a super performance, all the girls cheered.

"That fellow is truly doing as she pleases... She should really hold back a little."

Rather than surprised, it would be better to say Godou was impressed.

As someone who already knew her extraordinary athleticism, this level of performance was completely unsurprising. Even if her baseball experience was zero, she was a monster who could give a performance exceeding professionals.

"So, Kusanagi-san, how are you?"

Yuri had left the girls' team and came over to greet Godou.

Come to think of it, gym class was the only time when the 6th Class' Yuri shared lessons with Erica.

"Is Erica-san using some kind of strange magic? If that is the case, she must be stopped. To be performing at this level against boys is completely abnormal."

"I don't think so. Since this is a competition, she is achieving victory entirely on her own bodily strength."

Godou responded with a simple answer to Yuri who was questioning with a worried expression.

"She is a knight after all, but please don't cheat so much during times of jest... If only she insisted on fairness when I'm busy with things..."

Usually, Erica would use magic to enhance her abilities when messing around with Godou, but she insisted on fair competition when it came to gym class. Personally, Godou would prefer it if she did the opposite.

Sigh, he truly could not believe he became friends with someone like that.

"Erica's athletic abilities are extraordinary, and would cause one to suspect the use of magic because her bodily capability and stamina are beyond imagination."

Middle school was the time when Godou stood out as the cleanup hitter and catcher of the baseball team.

But because of that, he completely understood how unreasonable Erica's abilities were. If she actually played baseball, she would be the type to be the fourth bat, the cleanup hitter for sure.

"Though it feels like she's going too far, but it should still be within acceptable limits, right?"

"I see... Kusanagi-san, you trust Erica-san very much."

Yuri spoke with a slightly stiff expression on her face.

"When I saw that kind of performance, the first thing I thought was she must have used some kind of magic. I feel a bit ashamed for doubting someone due to prior bias."

"In this case she wasn't acting unreasonably. As long as she keeps it to this level of doing as she pleases."

While she completely destroyed the self-esteem of the opposing boys as well as her own catcher, Erica stood on the pitcher's

mound with a smile as radiant as the sun. As if she was enjoying things from the bottom of her heart.

"Anyway, though she is a sly fellow usually, her character is unbelievably straightforward, so don't worry, it'll be ok."

"...Understood. However, that actually makes one feel a bit envious."

Yuri relaxed her expression and smiled as she murmured.

A faint elegant smile, she seemed rather reserved with her smiles.

"Envious? Mariya?"

"Uh, yes... To be honest, I am actually not good with sports."

"Ah, I see."

Although a little surprised, Godou found it understandable.

Unlike her usual miko outfit, Yuri was currently wearing her sports uniform. Her slim body—clearly revealed how slender her limbs were.

...Furthermore, her excellent figure was also visible.

Although not to the same level as Erica, it was still a figure full of characteristically feminine curves. Feeling embarrassed, Godou frantically redirected his gaze to the match.

"Yes. My physical stamina is less than a normal person's. From birth, I have never had a happy memory related to sports."

Yuri's countenance seemed a little wistful as she shyly watched Godou while she opened up to him.

"Actually, that time when I fled from Athena, I felt muscle pain afterwards."

Godou felt apologetic since he felt like he did something bad during that incident.

However, he also noticed.

"I am very sorry about all those different troubles. But last time that rendezvous point shouldn't have been that far away from Mariya's shrine. Maybe a distance of two kilometers or so?"

Around that area, as he spoke, Godou recalled the map of the surroundings near Shiba Park.

However, Yuri was showing a harsh gaze indicative of slight anger.

"To me, that is quite a long distance! Kusanagi-san may be someone who has plenty of energy to waste, but do not look down on those who do not have physical stamina!"

For some strange reason, the angry Yuri seemed especially cute.

Of course, Godou did not dare reveal his inner thought. At that time, Godou only wanted to be as low key as possible.

"Uh, I'm truly sorry, if something like that ever happens again, please call me earlier and I will immediately come to your aid. Definitely, I promise."

Using Verethragna's authorities would allow one to literally "fly " to help those in a crisis.

Hence, it shouldn't be a false promise, probably... Godou wondered as he thought 'is it really ok?' Yuri nodded with a forced smile.

"Kusanagi-san, did you not warn that the power is a little uncertain and that you have yet to master it? It is not good to rely on such a power... please keep that in mind carefully."

Under the influence of Yuri's words and gentle smile, Godou also smiled.

Part 2

"So, Yuri-san, how do you feel after interacting with Kusanagi Godou?"

Sitting at the driver's seat and gripping the steering wheel was Amakasu, who suddenly asked a question.

Unable to discern his true intentions, Yuri who was sitting on the passenger side, gave a questioning expression and replied "Ah ?"

"What I want to ask is how is the great Devil King and Yuri-san's personal relationship going? One that began with the two of you overcoming a deadly crisis together. Does he have some kind of heart racing feeling beyond pure friendship, and will progress into happy yet embarrassing developments?"

"Amakasu-san, I do not understand at all what you are trying to confirm."

And didn't state clearly.

By the way, Yuri was dressed as a Japanese miko with her white robe. She had just been working at the Nanao Shrine and stopped when Amakasu dropped by to visit as agreed yesterday.

"We need to constantly review and adapt our relationship with him from this point onwards, so this is just for reference."

"Will the personal relationship between Kusanagi-san and I influence the plans of the Committee?"

"Of course, greatly."

Amakasu steered the car into the Shuto Expressway and drove towards Shibuya.

As a side note, traffic was still restricted on this same Shuto Expressway in the direction of dawn. This was due to the fact that repairs were still underway for the damage caused by the battle between Godou and Athena half a month ago.

"Honestly, we have no intention of making Kusanagi Godou an enemy. Before, he was just a senseless person who was not even [King] but now he has obtained a completely unreasonable power. Prior to that, it would have been impossible to even imagine him becoming a monster of some place."

"Why are you talking like that... Don't use words like 'monster.' He is still a normal person at heart..."

Without any pretense, Yuri tried to defend Godou.

However, if one simply looked at Godou's abilities, Amakasu's words were impossible to deny. Amakasu simply forced a smile and nodded.

"His future—to see what kind of Devil King he will develop into. As long as we maintain intimacy with him all along there will be room for establishing an ultimate relationship. If it weren't for that, we would not have prepared such a troublesome plan."

The caution displayed by Amakasu and the History Compilation Committee was understandable.

European countries already had a history of coexistence with a number of Campiones, and so the magic associations there were experienced with [King] dealings.

However, it was still the first time for the Committee to come into contact with a locally born Campione.

"Thus, in case of emergencies, it is necessary to establish a close friendly relationship with him. ...This was well played by the Copper Black Cross that first discovered the importance of Kusanagi Godou."

"The association Erica-san belongs to?"

"Yes. To send as a lover one of their candidates for core leadership, and to make as much use of his abilities in areas unrelated to the public, a truly shrewd and excellent strategy."

—Lover!?

Finally understanding Amakasu's words, Yuri's eyebrows shot up in anger.

"Is your side planning on adding someone like Erica!"

"After all, he is a young man despite being the great Devil King possessing divine authority—to manipulate him with a woman is a most practical solution. A classic strategy, wasn't there the story of Samson who was bewitched by Delilah in the Old Testament of the Bible?

"Please do not mix the Bible into this discussion!"

Yuri sternly reprimanded Amakasu who was chattering away.

The thought of some unknown beauty using her charms on Godou for such purposes made Yuri raise her voice without conscious intent.

"Kusanagi-san is currently at his limits resisting the seduction of Erica-san! This kind of behavior testing a person's self-control is completely unacceptable. Imprudent, unhealthy! What kind of woman do you actually want to put up to this task!?"

"Aya, we're finally back to the original topic, as for our female candidate..."

Amakasu sneered in a proud manner.

Yuri felt her body shake, and felt the coming of some unpleasant words, an unwelcoming premonition.

"I think that if Yuri would take on this role, you would be a perfect candidate. ...Even as a competitor against that Erica. I believe that Yuri-san is on the same level and certainly not inferior, isn't that great—"

"What, what are you talking about. I do not think I have any need to compete with Erica-san!"

The image formed in her mind was the brilliant blonde beauty, whose looks and outgoing personality were like the bright Mediterranean sun.

To compete against that kind of opponent for a boy's attentions.

Just the thought of it made Yuri feel like her hair was becoming white. Impossible and she completely refused to do it. What kind of joke was this?

"No no, it's possible. Though the opponent is strong, but on the other hand, Yuri-san also has substantial chances of success. Believe in yourself!"

"...Amakasu-san, please stop with these stupid jokes. Enough."

Whenever Yuri was truly furious, she always seemed like she was smiling for some reason.

Her lips slightly curled, and speaking with a cold tone.

"Oui, mademoiselle. My apologies, anyway, the plan just discussed was just one of many. If possible, please forget it."

With an exaggerated motion, Amakasu shrugged his shoulder then continued to drive without saying another word.

The two of them sat in the domestic car which exited the Shudo Expressway at the Shibuya exit, and continued towards the direction of Meguro.

Part 3

Located in a quiet corner of Aobadai was a certain building.

A public library managed and run by the History Compilation Committee.

All unrelated persons were prohibited. Even the residents from the surrounding area were unaware of what kind of public facility it actually was.

Yuri, led by Amakasu, stepped into this library.

As a library, its structure was exceedingly simple.

Throughout this clean and quiet library were shelves full of books.

However, there were very few people. The occasional person either belonged to the History Compilation Committee or was someone related. In addition, there were the books being collected.

Reference books recording all types of magic and wizardry—most of them were either grimoires or books about incantations.

Ordinary people could not comprehend these things. These were the distilled essence of danger and wisdom, forbidden books about magic.

The library existed precisely to house and isolate these precious hidden books from the world.

"Aobadai's book repository... Can you tell me? This is the first time for me to come here."

"Unless it was necessary to tell you, there was no need to come here. No, please wait for a moment? There are still some issues."

Leaving those words behind, Amakasu continued leading Yuri forward.

—There was a spacious reading room on the second floor of the library.

Yuri looked at her surroundings as she waited.

Though there was not a single other person, it looked very much like a normal library. However, the neat rows of books on the shelves gave off a strange presence which Yuri's spirit sense picked up.

This was not a simple book repository after all.

These books were born from the circulating records of the profound secrets of magic and wizardry.

These grimoires accumulated ancient and profound magic. It was said that some of the rare ones are classified as [Special Items].

The books collected here felt like masterpieces.

It was said that powerful mages and users of spirit powers wrote down numerous books by hand, and there have even been confirmed reports of books mass produced from printing presses suddenly obtaining magical properties.

...Yuri turned her curiosity to the book shelves.

The titles of these books varied, but most were written in western script. Those written in Japanese only took up less than 30%.

The activities of the History Compilation Committee only began after the Second World War.

Committee members played a large role in restricting the spread of magical knowledge from foreign sources. The numerous books contained in this library were surely the result of decades of their efforts to collect grimoires.

"Sorry to have you waiting, but what we wanted you to look at was this. Since it is guarded by powerful spells, forcefully reading ahead will definitely cause something bad to occur, and no one can predict what may happen."

Amakasu returned, and in his hands was a leather-bound foreign text that was not very thick.

"...Something bad may occur?"

"Yes. Probably something like placing yourself in a corner of the room, talking to angels that no one else can see, then making sounds like 'ah papapa' and going on a mental journey around the world."

"A common person cannot appraise such a dangerous book!"

You should have given me such an important warning earlier. Yuri spoke with an unyielding tone.

"Probably, if it is being guarded by such a strong spell, then it must be a powerful grimoire without a doubt! I see no point in further appraisal..."

"Ah yes, this is why human desire is so terrifying. Why do these grimoires need to be enchanted with such strong spells of protection? It feels similar to the way that prices are raised for rare books. ...However, if it's Yuri-san then it should be safe to appraise the book without reading the contents. It'll be fine."

Making a harmless expression, Amakasu spoke as he smiled, and placed the book on one of the larger tables in the reading room .

[Homo homini lupus][7].

This was the title written on the cover.

From the paper quality and damage to the bindings, it appeared to be an ancient tome over a century old. Lupus—meant wolf in Latin, recalled Yuri.

"If this is authentic, it should be a grimoire privately published in Romania around the earlier half of the nineteenth century. Past legends tell of an Ephesian secret cult worshipping the [Dark Virgin Mother of God, Queen of Wild Beasts] and holding covert rituals where people who tried to read the books would be 'turned into inhuman servants covered with fur.' Inhuman and covered with fur—generally refers to things like wolves and bears."

Amakasu's casual example revealed the depth of his knowledge .

Yuri felt that his words felt a bit fantastical.

"In terms of changes, what is well known is that people's bodies will undergo complete transformations after reading. Rather than a grimoire, a cursed book would be a better description—"

"Ah ah, you're right. Those magic books will continue to increase the werewolves' curse. Due to this, if it's the real thing it is an extremely rare and precious treasure."

"Please don't talk about that in such a happy manner!"

Yuri reprimanded Amakasu's impropriety with a stare and faced the ancient book once again.

—Concentrating her gaze and calming her heart.

Her spirit vision was not a power that could be used at will freely.

Melting the heart into the sky, entrusting it to guidance from the divinities, and making use of eyes and instinct. This would allow one to see something or notice something. Depending on the situation, one sometimes found important clues, but they might not be what one was expecting. Furthermore, there was always an issue of accuracy in divination.

...However, a wise historical existence could be felt from this book.

There was some truth to Amakasu's words.

Once upon a time, there was a witch who lived in the depths of the forest, and many of the animals respected her—in particular the stronger existences of wolves, bears and birds. This book recorded the difficult and powerful points of the ritual. The only ones able to read the book were either servants or people related to the witch, and the book would reject all common magi.

"This is not a cursed book... as long as the one reading it had sufficient experience and capability, then one would not be harmed by the hidden mysterious powers of this book, and would obtain knowledge instead."

Yuri vaguely felt the properties of the book and muttered.

"I think it is a device meant to prevent the unqualified from reading it—it is a test for resisting the curse rather than an intention to transform the reader's body."

"Ah yes, so to sum up, this is the real thing. As expected of Yuri-san, you saw through everything."

"This is all I know for now. I can't guarantee for the rest, so don't count too much on this kind of ability."

Amakasu agreed with Yuri's deductions. —And then

The werewolf-controlling grimoire of the witch, as well as Amakasu Touma. The library.

All these vanished suddenly. Yuri and the space around her was enveloped in darkness. She felt like she was standing in the dark surrounded by a gloomy atmosphere.

"Is this a hallucination? Due to the grimoire?"

Yuri tried to raise her spirit vision and see the truth behind these illusions.

This was a rare occurrence but it does happen occasionally when contact was made with an object hiding strong magical powers. Hence, there was no feeling of panic at the time—

The hallucination persisted.

There was something in the depths of the darkness. Focusing her gaze, it seemed to resemble something like a rat. The rat slowly transformed, gradually increasing in body mass. In addition, it changed its posture. This was a dog... no, a wolf. From its ferocious and sharp appearance, Yuri made such an identification.

From its four legs the wolf stood up onto two. Rather than a wolf, this was a werewolf's posture.

Was it due to contact with that grimoire? A hallucination as a result of that?

As Yuri puzzled, the werewolf slowly walked in the darkness—from the dark hole walking up to the surface of the ground. From there, dancing serpents could be seen. The werewolf stepped upon and slaughtered them all.

And then the werewolf reached out with its arms towards the bright sun in the sky.

Caught it. The werewolf caught the glowing sphere with its bare hands.

In the end, the werewolf swallowed the ball of light, and gradually took on the form of an elderly human. It was the person who Yuri met before.

A tall thin body, wise-looking face—and emerald green eyes.

The ancient Campione ruling over eastern and southern Europe . The ancient Devil King cast the light from his evil eyes at Yuri and smiled hideously.

"—Marquis Voban!? How, why are you here!?"

As the most intense terror attacked Yuri and she wailed, consciousness was soon lost.

Part 4

It was around 10pm at night when that phone call reached the Kusanagi residence.

"Yes, Kusanagi here."

'This voice, is it Godou? It's been a while, how are you, my friend?'

It was a slightly familiar voice heard from before, in fact it was a voice Godou didn't want to hear coming from the receiver.

A complete waste of a voice with such depth. Godou immediately put down the receiver and hung up the phone.

"...Ch. That brat finally revived!"

Godou who usually did not pray for the misfortune of others, felt like this was one of those exceptions.

Just to be safe, he unplugged the telephone wire from the base of the phone. Temporarily avoiding phone calls was an acceptable sacrifice for this cause.

However, his cellphone began to ring when he returned to his own room.

Godou glanced at the display, the caller's name was "Unknown. "

Furthermore, a foreign phone call? Should he just ignore it? But then there was a huge risk. Perhaps one day he might open the door to his home to find that fellow appearing and saying 'I came over because you didn't pick up the phone.' That would be the worst scenario.

Godou prepared himself and pressed the button to pick up the call.

'Suddenly hanging up the phone, that's too cruel!'

"You bastard. Anyway, why do you know my home and cellphone numbers?"

'You're such a fool. Isn't it natural to know a good friend's phone number?'

If this was a face to face conversation, then he'd probably be doing things like winking as well.

Blonde hair, blue eyes, tall and handsome. A bright expression on his proper face, and extremely friendly. The appearance of an elegant gentleman, but in reality, the strongest warrior possessing a body of steel—

Godou recalled the image of the one who called himself his ' good friend.'

"Hey Salvatore Doni, we don't really count as friends you know, and I don't remember ever telling you my phone numbers."

'Hmph, you're the fellow who didn't even want to exchange phone numbers or mailing addresses. Thanks to you, I had to order my subordinates to investigate. And from now on, please do not use "don't really count" to describe our relationship. Didn't I say already, that we are great friends?'

"If that's what you think, please look up the dictionary definition for the word 'friend' one thousand times before you call again."

Salvatore Doni.

The twenty-four-year-old Italian, as well as the Sixth Campione.

He possessed massive influence centered around southern Europe, and had defeated four gods. In terms of age and experience, he would count as Godou's senior.

However, Godou had no intention of using honorifics with this guy.

Godou himself found it unbelievable, since he would usually interact with elders with the appropriate attitude and word choice.

However, it was entirely different when facing this man. From the depths of his heart, a certain subtle feeling of opposition prevented it.

'Hey hey, the one who doesn't understand friendship is you. That is totally shameful for a Japanese.'

"What does nationality have to do with it?"

'Of course it does. I remember that "write letters to enemies, and predict the thoughts of friends" is a Japanese saying. It was written clearly in some Japanese literature I read before."

"Uh... is that really so?"

Godou felt that there must be some mistake in Doni's words. In reality, Godou did recall something similar lost in the depths of his memories. If it was really true, could this guy actually be correct?

'It's possible, after all our relationship is not the type which improves after a fight to the death. —At that time, how many times did our fists pummel each other, and how many rounds did our blades clash together violently?'

"What blade clashing? I only got stabbed by you... No, I just got sliced by you."

To Doni's enthusiastic words, Godou simply responded coldly.

This man is full of exaggerated delusions and a total medieval chivalry romantic, better stay away from him.

'You were truly great that time. Overcoming unavoidable death and fighting me with fierce burning battle spirit—I responded with all my strength.'

"Going all out on a lower level opponent like me, you really lack the magnanimity of an adult."

'We both felt it during that battle right? Ufu, that this man before me will be a worthy rival for eternity. —As fated opponents to battle to the death repeatedly. How could you not have felt that? '

"Didn't feel a thing! Not even for an instant!"

'—And thus, my eternal rival. With love and respect please call me Salvatore. How about it, you can even call me by my pet name [Toto].'

Though it was extremely tiring to talk to this guy who was impossible to argue against, Godou still forced himself to respond in the negative.

"I'd rather die than use your pet name!"

'Hoho, you're still such a shy boy. You know you want me, but still treating me so coldly... I know, this must be what they call tsundere in Japan.'

"You have seriously misunderstood Japanese culture! If that's all you're going to talk about, I'll be hanging up now?"

Godou totally felt that he had already wasted too many words with this idiot, and was about to hang up.

'Please wait, my friend. Today I just wanted to give you a warning. Do you know of the one named "Sasha Dejanstahl"?'

"Just in name only. Isn't it the strange old Devil King who lives near you?"

'Well, it's actually the Italian peninsula and the Balkans respectively. If you look at the map, I guess you could say it's close by. That old gramps really doesn't have a personality that one could easily live with, but recently it seems like he's no longer there.'

"I don't even know if it's a castle or a dungeon located in some place!"

Godou casually imagined the great elder Devil King and how he would speak, but somehow it didn't fit.

'Oh, that's called classical style. I don't think that kind of life is bad actually, but old Mr. Voban doesn't agree, that person has very few desires other than gluttony, and doesn't care much about things like land or architecture.'

Another unexpected character commentary.

...Come to think of it, whether Kusanagi Godou or Salvatore Doni, both were [Devil Kings] and fearful existences to others. However, both had idiosyncrasies that were rather unbecoming for a [Devil King], so perhaps it wasn't too surprising after all.

'Before he became king he lived as a vagabond, and led a tough life always short on food for almost two decades. His life was turned around when he defeated either the monstrous wolf Fenrir or Garm.'

"Isn't Garm the hellhound in Norse mythology?"

'You are correct. In some places he is also known as Garmr.'

—These were definitely things that fellow Erica would know.

Godou gathered his thoughts as he listened and answered briefly, but if he went over to ask that girl, it would only turn into a situation where she would force unnecessary knowledge into him.

Apparently before Doni became a Campione, he was an unsuccessful Templar Knight. Completely opposite to Erica's genius talent in both magic and swords, Doni's only asset was his unsurpassed skill with the sword, but his talent in magic was zero. To a Templar Knight who required skill in both swords and magic, it was equivalent to a mark of failure.

'Well, this probability is higher. Though the god he defeated first is unknown, it is known that the Marquis Voban's first authority could summon several hundred wolves to do his bidding with the power of the [Legion of Hungry Wolves]. Due to this, he must have killed some kind of wolf god.'

"Several hundred of them, that number is really..."

'Subsequent authorities included transforming people into salt with a stare, calling forth storms to blow away towns and roads, and turning the people he killed into something like zombies or ghosts to be used as obedient slaves.'

Truly Campiones are the worst. Godou sighed.

Both Doni and himself were the same—people who possessed unreasonable special abilities.

"Anyway, so what does this troublesome old gramps have to do with me?"

'Aya, sorry, I almost forgot. Since this old gramps should now be in Tokyo, there was something about shopping, and also something about staying out of his territory...'

"Who would do something like that! So why did he come to Japan!?"

Godou yelled loudly, and really felt like scratching his head.

...Heading towards troublesome developments again. Give me a break.

'Hohoho, I can tell you, but there's a condition—if you beg for assistance from me who is your friend, older brother, as well as the hero Salvatore, then I will immediately...'

"I definitely refuse! I don't need you to tell me!"

After refusing, Godou tried some other questions.

"That old gramps has defeated quite a few gods, right? Also, you've killed Irish and Norse gods before, right? How many are there in total?"

'If you add up both our kills, probably over ten. Is there a problem?'

"No, for each god you've defeated, it means one less for me to fight."

Who knows how many gods there were all over the world. The fewer left to fight the better. Godou spoke as he worried about his own situation.

'Haha, what are you talking about? Even if the other Campiones and I defeat all the other gods, battle will come when it comes. This kind of calculation is pointless.'

"Why? If you guys kill them all, then they can't fight any more, right?"

'—Even if we kill gods, they are not erased entirely. As long as mankind exists, and myths perpetuate, killed gods can resurrect. Never forget that.'

Doni was speaking in a rare serious tone.

Dark battle spirit and joyful feelings were quietly stored in his heart. Though he looked outgoing and frivolous in appearance, he was a man with a warrior spirit, living for the sword and dying for battle.

'After all, only part of a god appears on earth for us to fight. Their true nature are myths. Even if their bodies are destroyed, as long as myths continued to exist, they will be able to rematerialize and resurrect countless times. Furthermore, it is impossible to make myths disappear unless all of mankind is eliminated.'

"As long as myths exist, no matter how many times they will..."

'That's the way it is. So perhaps there may come a day for you to battle Verethragna again. That god is rather famous in western Asia, and it won't be surprising for him to resurrect somewhere.'

This was all there was to the conversation with Salvatore.

Disconnecting the call on his cellphone, Godou felt troubled. — Let's hope it won't turn into a battle against the oldest Campione...

Part 5

Yuri woke up to find herself at Nanao Shrine.

Yuri had been sleeping on some blankets in a traditional Japanese-style room of the shamusho.[8]

She felt very dry in her mouth.

Adjusting her kimono and hair, Yuri walked out of the room.

The kitchen was also located in the same building and had a well-stocked fridge. Wanting to get a drink, Yuri walked towards the kitchen.

"Ah, Yuri-san, that's great, you finally regained consciousness. ..Is your body feeling ok?"

Amakasu Touma was in the kitchen.

He was in the middle of browsing through dozens of documents laid out on the table.

"Did anything strange happen—what happened to me afterwards?"

"You were looking at that grimoire with your spirit vision as usual, and suddenly lost consciousness, so I hastily brought you back to the shrine. Aya, and the shrine leaders scolded me, sorry for bringing you trouble."

Bowing his head, Amakasu seemed to continue with great interest.

"And then Yuri-san's expression became very strange, did you see something?"

"No, not at all. I guess I was just a little tired that time, and then just lost consciousness. Nothing strange happened."

Yuri explained immediately.

Why would a hallucination of Sasha Dejanstahl occur? This was completely impossible to understand. Meeting that old man was over four years ago. Could it really be due to contact with the grimoire from eastern Europe that the memories of the Campione were awakened? Or, or was there another reason?

Anyway, one must not rashly jump to conclusions.

Yuri decided to change the subject, and glanced towards the documents Amakasu was reading.

"What are these? ...Resumes?"

If these were meant to be private, then they should not be spread out in such a place. It would be unthinkable for a

representative of the History Compilation Committee to be so imprudent.

Having thus decided, Yuri took a look at the pile of documents.

They all seemed to be resumes with L-size[9] photos clipped on.

...It looked like all the photos were of teenaged girls, and every one of them had a cute appearance. Some of the girls had a more mature and adult feel, while others were cute and innocent. There were also some girls who looked very outgoing, and others that looked quite sincere. There was a great variety of them.

"Ah ah, this is the matter we were talking about. To pick someone qualified to be the lover of Kusanagi Godou. Truly the elite of this nation, they are all extremely talented individuals."

Amakasu talked with quite a joyful appearance.

Yuri casually glanced at the resumes which resembled job recruitment profiles.

"Perhaps in order to defeat an opponent of Erica Blandelli's caliber, it would take a combination of elegance, adolescent adorability, and the friend route character. Sounds about right. However, there is also the possibility that he prefers other types. This is quite a difficult decision."

"Amakasu-san! Is your side really planning on putting that plan into motion!"

The History Compilation Committee member simply retracted his head slightly in response to Yuri's scolding.

"These are necessary human resources. Unless Yuri-san has a better suggestion?"

"Umm, ummm... If it is explained clearly to Kusanagi-san, and an opportunity is created for practical negotiations, he should be able to understand where he stands—"

"Haha, that's not going to work. He is a teenaged boy after all."

Amakasu laughed condescendingly with sounds of "hehe" as if trying to provoke Yuri's anger.

"No matter how honest he claims to be, he cannot refuse if he is begged by the girl he is going out with. That's what males are like... For a boy of that age, dreams or aspirations to higher morals can never compare to the value of girls."

"Precisely, that is why you cannot ignore the wishes of a girl and force her to play the role of a lover or anything like that!"

What Yuri feared was the History Compilation Committee using its authority to force this mission upon a hapless young girl or miko from some wizardry family.

That kind of tyranny was definitely unacceptable. To the excited Yuri, Amakasu calmly replied.

"How could that be? Don't worry about the will of the person being selected. They will be carefully chosen from volunteers. Relax."

"Ah!?"

"After all, the title of the Campione is very effective. Whether personally or the interests of the clan, there are numerous advantages to becoming the lover of the first Devil King of Japan. Lack of volunteers is simply not a concern."

Amakasu smiled in an extremely satisfied manner.

Yuri was shocked. Could there really be so many selfish volunteers appearing one after another—

The Latin beauty Erica Blandelli who called herself the lover of Kusanagi Godou and passionately approached him completely unabashed.

Strangely enough, Yuri did not feel repulsed by Erica's presence .

At most it made her feel awkward at times. Though Erica could be very calculating, she was always open and straightforward—perhaps due to that relaxed and candid personality.

No matter what, Erica could place herself in danger without hesitation for the sake of Godou.

After the battle with Athena, Yuri understood that perfectly. However, what about the other girls planning on approaching Godou in order to make use of his power and status?

"Still, still not allowed! If he gets close to girls with those kinds of intentions, what kind of bad influence will they bring? It's not easy for Kusanagi-san to have an opportunity to start a new life, what is going to happen!"

Yuri could not help yelling, feeling that this was a dirty matter.

"However, there will be a ton of people trying to use him for his powers anyway. If we don't do it, someone else will. Unless Yuri-san yourself will keep watch over this young man by his side. "

"But, but, if that's the case... However for me, I don't think Kusanagi-san has a good opinion of me."

He probably did not have a good impression from all that nagging from me.

Though Yuri was a complete stranger to the subtleties of the male heart, however, she felt that her conclusions were correct. Since she had always been distancing herself from others in an obvious manner, it was natural to think that others thought the same.

Shyly, Yuri bowed her head.

Probably, my face was blushing all red, the color of a fully ripened persimmon.

"On the other hand, perhaps it is Yuri-san who dislikes Kusanagi Godou?"

"Dislike!? Not at all. Though Kusanagi-san and Erica's actions are inappropriate, I do feel that he is friendly, generous and a person of good character. He is not arrogant despite possessing that level of power, and being humble is one of his virtues ... So, I don't dislike him at all."

"Hoho, it really is like that. Then please maintain current relations for now. Blushing shyly, your head bowed down, yes yes, very good. Extremely cute."

"Ah, Amakasu-san, what are you talking about?"

Amakasu suddenly took out his cellphone and snapped a picture of Yuri with the camera.

Yuri could not understand the intentions behind his actions.

"Reference material. The other Committee members will definitely approve at the next meeting. Anyway, the power of Yuri-san's photo will surely blow away the competition."

"Uh? What do you mean?"

"Isn't it true that Yuri-san doesn't wish for unscrupulous girls to approach Kusanagi Godou? In that case you must develop good relations with him, isn't that right?"

"That's why I said, I am not..."

"Nothing to worry about. We the History Compilation Committee will lend you our full support, and so, please win over Kusanagi Godou with full confidence!"

The declaration shocked Yuri like a clap of thunder.

"Win, win over!? I don't intend to have that kind of relationship with Kusanagi-san!"

"Hohoho, still not being honest. Whatever, this will be a perfect ingredient to flavor the dish, let's just leave it at that."

Amakasu gave a fearless smile as he spoke with incomprehensible words.

"Let's put it this way. We wish to massively increase Yuri-san's influence over Kusanagi Godou. Our hope is that whenever he is tempted by Erica Blandelli, or when he is falling into darkness drunk on the power of his authority, you can persuade him and guide him down the right path."

"I can guide that person towards the right path?"

"Yes. Just become closer to him starting with normal situations, and have a better relationship with him than Erica Blandelli. Do your best. It's a promise. If you can do that, we will terminate that plan."

Amakasu's tone of voice was akin to the serpent who tricked Eve into eating the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil, but Yuri was completely oblivious.

"...No, but even now, all I've been doing is nagging at Kusanagi-san, and leaving him with a bad impression. It's probably fruitless to try to improve relations at this point—"

To become even more intimate with him than that Erica, it was completely unthinkable.

Amakasu answered the insecure Yuri with a naughty smile.

"Please don't worry. I have a secret plan—and it works precisely because the current relationship is distant. Up to now, it only counts as the tsun phase, so if you start going dere as much as possible from this point on, boys will definitely fall for you without fail!"

"—Ah? What... is that?"

"First why don't you try making a lunchbox personally? Then say 'This is extra, it's not like I made it specially for you, but it would be a shame for it to go to waste, so here you go' when you hand it over to him. Isn't that the best tactic?"

"Ah!?"

"Pardon my forwardness, but if you lack information in this area, I can provide some from my personal collection. I'll send them over in a short while; do you prefer DVDs or games?"

"Ah, umm, Amakasu-san? Please don't continue the conversation so casually."

In reality, this event would end up having a great influence in Godou and Yuri's future life.

Of course, Yuri at that time had no idea at all.

Part 6

It was a beautiful Japanese garden of a hotel.

To Liliana Kranjcar who was born and grew up in Milan and whose grandfather was Croatian, the spacious garden in a former nobleman's antiquated mansion was a very interesting space.

There was plenty of natural scenery in the grounds which covered tens of thousands of square meters.

Lush green trees were neatly trimmed, while water flowed into pools through small rivers. There were also ancient pagodas and sacrificial altars in the depths of the waterfall.

However, this garden full of foreign allure seemed to have no effect on her companion.

Upon deciding on the accommodations in Tokyo, Sasha Dejanstahl Voban immediately arrived there. As if shaken by the compact style of the garden, Liliana also became subservient.

Voban's bedroom was located in a separate building within the hotel's garden.

A tiny traditional Japanese house.

However, its interiors were very modern in contrast to the traditional outer appearance.

In it contained western style rooms that a European like Liliana could quickly get accustomed to. There were also a few Japanese style rooms with tatami and ornamental screens.

"So Kranjcar, is there any news of the miko?"

Voban suddenly asked.

Voban spoke with perfect Japanese as he downed the cup of sake by himself, looking over the typical but undistinguished menu listing items like tempura and sashimi.

Until the previous day, this old man had no knowledge of the Japanese language.

However, both Campiones and accomplished magi possessed exceptional language learning ability. As a result, it was not surprising that Voban had mastered the language simply by conversing with Liliana who excelled in Japanese.

Furthermore, it only took him about fifty to sixty minutes.

Learning an unknown language in such a short time would not have been possible for Liliana. Likewise, even other Campiones and Great Knights would probably fail to match such a feat.

"No, not yet. My apologies."

Liliana bowed her head in penance.

—Mariya Yuri, fifteen years of age, lived in the bay area of Tokyo. Possessing exceptional spirit vision, she was a special religious leader called the Hime-Miko.

In reality, this level of information was extremely easy for her organization the Bronze Black Cross to investigate.

Even so, Liliana did not report with honesty.

She recalled the things done to the girls in the Austrian villa four years ago. Amongst all the miko there, Yuri had been the most silent and the one with the most conservative personality. Furthermore, she looked the weakest and most delicate.

However, who was the first to arrive at Voban's ritual site?

Everyone there had been very frightened, but she was the first to enter. She understood the fear in the other girls, and decided to go ahead herself.

"...Hmph, is that so. Anyway, it's fine. If it so happens, what should one do if a little bird jumped into a cage? If you tie a rope to it, no matter where it went, you can find the cage easily enough. "

Voban gloated as he moved his fingers over the cup.

—A birdcage? Liliana frowned at the strange analogy.

"About what I just said, I wonder who was it that hallucinated the image of I, Voban? Perhaps some kind of chance occurrence, where they mistook a prophetic ability as spirit vision—it's not some kind of powerful wizardry ability, right?"

Of course, whether the person who hallucinated was Yuri or not , Liliana could not have known.

However, it was said that Campiones possessed extraordinary instincts.

There have been several rumors that Campiones can sense when they are in danger, and have an animal-like instinct to detect the presence of gods—their fated rivals. However, this was the first time Liliana heard that they could see through spirit vision.

What kind of extraordinary powers does this old man possess!

"I don't know if that fellow is the miko we need to find. However, I am positive it will be of great use to capture that person."

Voban smiled and finished the alcohol as if drinking water.

After several days together, Liliana could tell that he was not a picky eater.

He ate and drank everything and anything, consuming not for taste but only to satisfy hunger and thirst.

"You don't seem to be very good at finding things. Then how about we find someone else to take the job? Or perhaps, this should be a job for a witch—Maria Teresa, come here."

Voban called the name of a woman.

In response, a dead woman with deeply sunken eyes appeared out of space, wearing a large black hat—a member of the [Dead Servants].

"This deceased was once a witch, and shouldn't find it too hard to find the spirit vision user who saw me in a hallucination. Find that person using those skills you possessed when alive!"

The Dead Servant witch nodded to acknowledge the tyrannical order and disappeared once again.

Mariya Yuri will be caught sooner or later. Liliana had no doubts about it, and deeply sighed.

Chapter 3 - Arrival of a Devil King

Part 1

The night of the strange hallucinations had passed, and the next morning had arrived.

Going to school at the usual time, Mariya Yuri packed with her a cellphone with an aluminum shell.

It was given to her last night from Amakasu for the purpose of emergency contact. When the phone began to vibrate in silent mode, it happened to be during the noon break.

The call display did not reveal the name of the caller.

Since the phone handed over was brand new, Yuri had not entered any information into it. Though she knew it was Amakasu's phone number, she was not familiar with how to operate it.

"Eh? What should I do?"

Yuri hesitated for an instant as the display showed Amakasu's number.

Perhaps it was some kind of urgent incident. Yuri happened to be outside the school building and was walking in the central courtyard. She picked up the call in a place where she could not be seen.

Since it was her first time using a flip open phone, it took a bit of effort.

"Hey, hey... I am Mariya!"

Finally ending her struggle with the phone, Yuri picked up with a tone of panic.

'This is Amakasu. How are you feeling over there? Did you make a lunchbox for him as suggested yesterday?'

"Of, of course not! Please don't joke around!"

'It's not a joke. Today's request for Yuri-san is to use all sorts of methods to get close to him. Let's a have a real strategy meeting later.'

"Ah? Amakasu-san!?"

The call ended.

What should one do to get closer to Kusanagi Godou? Yuri felt it was a tough decision. Last night, she felt quite depressed due to accepting this difficult mission.

"—Excuse me, Mariya-senpai, could that possibly be... a cellphone?"

Yuri turned to see the one greeting her, and found Kusanagi Shizuka standing there.

The younger sister of the current subject of interest, in addition to being the middle school third year student who was Yuri's junior in the tea ceremony club. This chance encounter gave Yuri quite a surprise.

"What, what happened? Everyone had been saying that senpai didn't have a cellphone until now? Didn't you say you had no interest?"

Shizuka was very surprised.

During club activities, whenever anyone asked about her cellphone number or email address, Yuri's negative reply was always "because I don't think I have any special need..."

"A necessary reason came up recently. It's also a lot more convenient for staying in contact with each other..."

Feeling that an excuse of convenience was rather sad, Yuri felt depressed as she answered.

In such a place she did not have an obvious reason for using such a full featured phone. In fact she was totally technologically illiterate and did not understand networks very well. Yuri regretted her answer as she spoke.

"Eh? Contact each other? With whom do you need to stay in contact?"

"Sorry, please don't ask any further because it is something I cannot answer in detail. My apologies."

Though she was talking to someone younger than her, Yuri was bowing her head down with full seriousness throughout.

Her identity as the Hime-Miko as well as the existence of the History Compilation Committee were absolute secrets. It would be best if she could muddle through this without issue.

"Could it be that... the other person wanted to keep it a secret?"

"No, not at all. However, cellphones are quite hard to use, right? But everyone seems to use them so easily, I really cannot understand—"

In response to her honest and frank answer, Shizuka suddenly felt apologetic and bowed her head.

"Sorry, Mariya-senpai. For you to be so troubled due to my Onii-chan—"

"Eh? This matter and Kusanagi-san—your brother— are totally unrelated—But then again, what is the commotion about?"

Brother—Unable to understand why Shizuka was apologizing on Godou's behalf, Yuri blinked.

"However, could there be any other reason? Wouldn't the most likely reason for a sudden need for a cellphone be for staying in touch with a boyfriend at all times... As for Mariya-senpai, the most probable candidate is... my stupid Onii-chan, isn't that right?"

Yuri thought that Shizuka was a rather clever child.

She was a girl with quick wits and had picked up all the club knowledge rapidly.

Yuri frantically tried to deny.

"No, that is not the reason. It is due to work, I need the cellphone for my work!"

"But Mariya-senpai's part-time job is being a miko. I've never heard of shrine miko having a need to be on call for emergencies. Even if you deny it, I know you are lying, but I understand! It's all my stupid Onii-chan's fault!"

Shizuka furiously scolded her brother with intensity.

Sigh, as the Hime-Miko, all sorts of emergencies have come up ever since the supernatural Campione appeared by her side... Yuri felt very gloomy that she could not reveal such things honestly.

"Starting from the last spring break, it was already very suspicious. Frequently staying out overnight! And then suddenly becoming so close with Erica-san and Yuri-senpai all of a sudden!"

"It's not due to Kusanagi-san, please don't get so upset..."

"Mariya-senpai just said previously that it has nothing to do with Onii-chan—but isn't it related to Onii-chan now?"

Truly, Shizuka was very smart and picked up what was carelessly revealed.

Her cute face might suggest otherwise, but she was very competitive in spirit. Furthermore, she was also much better with words, and Yuri felt an absolute disadvantage in trying to argue with this opponent.

"I get it, Onii-chan also seems to be carrying a cellphone lately, and was talking to someone last night. Since he had to hide in his room to take the call secretly, I'm guessing the other person was Erica-san."

"Eh? Is that so?"

Yuri innocently believed Shizuka's speculation.

Godou's actual caller was the Italian young man, completely unrelated to love and lust, but there was no way for these two to know that.

"Apparently, school is not enough, and they still have to talk so intimately by phone at home—if Mariya-senpai didn't have a cellphone, it would be very difficult to compete..."

"Eh, eh? Has things progressed to this stage already—!"

This news gave Yuri quite a serious shock.

She felt very concerned at the thought that Erica and Godou were doing things together outside of school.

However, what really needed vigilance were the impure relations between opposite genders outside of school, right?

Yuri felt ashamed of her shallow experience with the ways of the world.

(No, it is not too late to start now. To correct my own deficiencies... to achieve a closer relationship with Kusanagi-san than what E-Erica-san has!)

Yuri whispered to herself, and vowed to her own heart to improve herself.

Even though it was at someone else's request, if she agreed to it she will give it her best!

"Shizuka-san, I have a request."

"Yes, yes."

Yuri suddenly lifted her head, and said seriously.

Feeling her spirit, the angry Shizuka began to calm down.

"Could you teach me how to use my cellphone? Though I already know how to pick up and dial calls, but I know nothing other than that."

"Oh, oh that, I don't mind."

As if crushed in spirit, Shizuka answered in a state of panic.

Unaware of her dominating power whenever she faced others with her stern and serious demeanor, Yuri felt it was a little strange but nodded.

"Actually your brother—Kusanagi-san—once told me his telephone number, but I am not sure how to use the contact list in the phone."

"Mariya-senpai, you don't mind giving your number to Onii-chan, right..."

"Also, I have another request. Could you tell me how to get closer to a boy?"

"Eh!?"

To Shizuka's shock, Yuri got more excited as she spoke.

"I have a need to establish a much closer relationship with your brother. This is not just for me, but for others around me as well, and for your brother's future. However, why this is necessary, I don't understand it at all."

"But, but, Mariya-senpai, I also don't have any clue..."

"Though I can't explain it very well, but time cannot be wasted any more. I really need someone who can be my teacher... I think if it's the smart Shizuka-san, you can definitely be a good role model for me. Please, lend me your strength."

Worrying was pointless, it is best to take action first—Yuri deeply bowed her head.

"Oooh? You are really asking for my help? But definitely, Mariya-senpai is much better than Erica... Ah ah, to think that you would be attracted to someone like my Onii-chan..."

Yuri kept her head bowed sincerely as Shizuka chattered on.

Soon after, Shizuka sighed deeply.

"...Mariya-senpai, about my stupid Onii-chan, is it really true?"

"Yes, it's true."

Yuri had misunderstood Shizuka's 'is it really love' question as ' do you really have to improve relations,' but neither of them noticed.

"An, an immediate answer... Well, if it's come to this, I guess a suggestion or two can be given... Just a little bit..."

Shizuka spoke extremely softly.

Hearing such a response, Yuri's eyes were like flashing lights, and she smiled naturally.

"Much appreciated! This feels like a bright light appearing out of total darkness!"

"Please, please don't show such a bright smile... It's just minor support."

"Yes? What is it? Shizuka-san?"

"Nothing. Ah, right, Mariya-senpai, do you have my Onii-chan's email address?"

Yuri showed a mystified expression at Shizuka's mentioning of a term she did not recognize.

"Email... address? What is that?"

"You really don't know what it is eh. Well then, I have a good idea, just go ask him directly in the classroom—let that idiot Onii-chan suffer the consequence."

Shizuka laughed "hoho" malevolently and suggested.

Unable to understand the intentions, Yuri felt troubled. However, it was not easy to find someone to give advice, so Yuri decided to go along with it.

Part 2

In the classroom of the First Year Fifth Class, Erica and Godou were preparing to have lunch.

It was the lunch prepared by Erica—no, Arianna who played the role of the maid. Today, Godou brought his own lunchbox.

If he didn't make preparations, he felt like he was making trouble for others.

Arianna generously accommodated Godou's suggestion. By the way, Erica who had no intention of cooking anyway, kept a neutral stance and was fine either way.

At this time, unexpected visitors arrived.

"Hey, Onii-chan, can you lend this to me?"

Hearing his sister's usual voice from home, Godou turned his head around.

It was Shizuka in her middle school uniform, and behind her was Mariya Yuri.

"Ara. Isn't it Shizuka and Yuri? How rare for you both to be here..."

Erica spoke with all smiles.

Yuri simply nodded in response, while Shizuka greeted her with something like "Hello, Erica-san."

"Shizuka, is it really ok for you to come to a high school classroom?"

"I'm not certain, but there's no school rule forbidding it right? By the way, Mariya-senpai has a cellphone now."

A middle school girl who seemed close to Godou, plus the appearance of Yuri. The boys of the Fifth Class were busy listening in with an expression of "what!"

—Mariya, has a cellphone now?

—Idiot. Don't you know the last virtual girl's IT revolution blog ?

—Damn it, the creature known as man truly has the ability to change women?

Subtly sensing their fury, Godou felt an ominous premonition.

By the way, Shizuka was smiling proudly. Yuri was surveying the changes in the surroundings. Erica was quietly watching everything with interest while saying "eh."

"Onii-chan, give your cellphone number and email address to Mariya-senpai. She wants to enter it right now."

"Ah? Didn't I tell her my number before?"

Yuri shyly lowered her head and answered Godou.

"My apologies, Kusanagi-san... I am actually bad with technology. Since I don't know how to operate it I decided to come here to exchange our information after discussing it with Shizuka-san."

"Well, it's actually quite simple, not difficult at all."

So, she is surprisingly unfamiliar with these things. Godou took out his cellphone.

Yuri also frantically extracts the silver phone.

"So, let's do it quickly with the infra-red then."

"Sure. So, does making calls have anything to do with infra-red? "

Did she even know how to send information using the infra-red ? To Godou's suggestion, Yuri's hesitant face was full of questions.

...First, it's probably best to teach her the basic way to use the phone.

After reconsidering, Godou told his phone number and email address to Yuri and showed her how to send mail. He explained to her all she need to do was register the incoming mail and showed her how.

The two of them operated Yuri's cellphone together.

Without paying attention, the distance between them gradually shrank.

—Their exhaled breaths were almost reaching each other's faces. Though it was a delicate and beautiful face, it was also a nervous one as Yuri operated her phone clumsily.

Finally aware that she was a beautiful girl, Godou began to feel shy.

In the instant Godou turned his face away, his gaze met with Shizuka's smiling eyes full of challenging intent.

This fellow, what was she planning this time? By the time he discovered it, the boys' riot was about to begin.

"Ah ohohoh, Mariya-san, could you tell me what is your phone number!"

Nanami suddenly yells from his seat on the left near the front.

The boys in the class were making comments like 'secretly confessing with a serious expression that I actually find miko moe', or 'Mariya who seems to be working as a miko, please bury Kusanagi in darkness for the safety of all bathing miko.' It was impossible to pretend not to have heard such words of jest.

"Same here! I also want Mariya-san's phone number!"

"We will never let you keep such important information all to yourself."

"This is for the love of all the boys in the class! The opportunity is here."

"Go die, Kusanagi! We are the poor proletariat, and we swear we will oppose to the utter end the capitalist class who acquired their wealth through illicit means."

As Nanami's roars echoed across the classroom, the room was filled with the yelling of the boys.

Yuri felt surprised by the forcefulness of their desperation, and surveyed the surroundings with a look that approached extreme fear.

"Ah ah, this isn't looking good, Onii-chan. It's tough to be a popular boy."

The sister who came over with Yuri, the focus of attention, was speaking in a rather unfriendly manner.

"Shi... Shizuka, what are you trying to say..."

"Hmph. What a great important character to be so welcomed by the girls, but you need your medicine once in a while."

Dear sister, please don't create situations for me with these kinds of motives.

Godou prayed towards the sky in response to Shizuka's merciless words.

"—Sorry everyone."

It was Yuri who spoke.

She seemed to have recovered from her shock, and spoke with a determined voice.

"I have no intention of exchanging phone numbers with anyone other than Kusanagi-san. None whatsoever. So please calm down and don't make a scene. Thank you."

Though her words were serious and polite, but there was a certain irresistible force to them.

The boys quieted down in an instant and the classroom became peaceful again. However, the entire class of boys angrily watched Godou with eyes of murderous intent.

—You again with all these fortunate happenings.

—This is truly another trial, go to the roof.

—Shot in the back on a battlefield, sigh.

Caught in a silent eddy current, Godou began to have cold sweat from the feeling of danger. Shizuka adds fuel to the fire by making comments like "Wow, such a bold declaration in front of so many people, it really must be true..."

In addition, Erica who was observing everything from the side was laughing to herself.

"Hey Yuri, though it's true that my Godou is quite attractive, but the other boys are really pitiful. They have already been watching Godou and my love life every single day, and so accumulated a lot of stress."

The gazes of the class immediately gathered upon the blonde Italian girl.

Maintaining an elegant motion, Erica began to project her voice as if she was the female lead in a performance.

"Since there's no rain today, let's have lunch on the roof then. Is that fine, Godou? We welcome Yuri and Shizuka to join us. Isn't it true for meals, the more the merrier, right?"

Erica hurried Godou and addressed the two visitors, then took lead by leaving the classroom.

Completely confident that her orders will be followed, she exited the classroom without turning back.

Truly, Erica's experience in this area was no joking matter. Whether as the speaker or as the listener, she had ample insight. Godou took his lunch bag out of his school bag.

Gesturing for his sister and Yuri to follow him, Godou ran after Erica.

"Feels like things have become more interesting, Godou?"

Erica's mood was great as she spoke after Godou caught up to her.

"...You're just having fun without concern for others. It's probably just you who thinks it's funny. Meanwhile I am being burdened by these strange troubles... Shizuka has also started to notice something is abnormal."

"Don't worry, no matter what that child thinks, she will soon understand the difference in power."

"Difference in power? What is that?"

Erica made a glamorous smile at Godou's question.

"No matter what troubles the sister-in-law or the secondary wife cause, the one with the most power is still me—Godou's first wife Erica Blandelli. Anyway, don't concern yourself with such trivial matters, for them to seek support is fine with me!"

"Don't say something like sister-in-law, where did you learn that kind of Japanese anyway!"

This day, what Godou brought was an ordinary lunch with rice balls and all sorts of pickles.

The salmon and the fish roe in the rice balls should be fine.

...Originally, Erica's situation was that she would comment with a subtle expression that eating dried plums and the like was a challenge to everyone except the Japanese. However, starting from some point, she started describing the extremely sour Kishu plum as "a fruit with an amazing taste," and even ate it along with the seed by shattering it with her teeth.

A girl with a well-developed body, who turned out to be someone who would eat anything.

This is probably the success of the elite education of the knights to better accumulate stamina in the body by avoiding picky eating.

She was now wolfing down the rice balls Godou made.

"Last time when I was having sushi at Godou's home, I wondered if this was something I could make myself? Isn't it just rice with some fish mixed inside, very simple, right?"

"If that's what you think, try it yourself some time."

Godou had never seen Erica cook anything other than instant noodles, probably since her primary concern towards food was the "eating" part.

"Those passes, really are troublesome."

To Erica's change of subject, Godou nodded at the expected response.

The sky was cloudy, and there were a few other groups eating lunch on the roof apart from them.

Next to Godou was Yuri eating her own lunch brought from the classroom, while Shizuka was having the sandwiches she had bought.

"So that's what Onii-chan was making in the kitchen early this morning... Really! You had to spend so much effort!"

Shizuka complained as she ate her sandwiches, while Yuri slowly worked her chopsticks at her mini-sized lunchbox.

In it was a small amount of rice, fried yellowtail fish with soya sauce, as well as fried egg and side dishes like spinach.

A few touches of tomato greatly enhanced the overall color, and looked very appetizing.

"...The content looks a lot less than what Godou made for lunch. "

"Erica, don't speak so tactlessly and stare at other people's lunch with such interest. My apologies Mariya, please don't mind and continue eating."

"If, if you want to try, please feel free to pick what you like."

Though her tone of voice seemed slightly forced, Yuri spoke with a smile.

Perhaps she wanted to improve the initial rocky relationship she had with Erica.

As Godou thought to himself, the blonde girl beside him reached her hand out without hesitation.

Directly grabbing a piece of fried egg and putting it in her mouth, Erica's manners were poor but the motions of her hand was very elegant.

"Hmm, the taste is not bad. If you made it slightly fluffier with a more sticky texture then that would be my favorite style. If Arianna made it, it would have been perfect, but that's asking for too much."

"You don't know how to cook but you sure know how to talk."

As he commented about Erica, Godou also reached out to try some of the fried egg.

The fried egg with sauce was very delicious, and the skipjack tuna sauce was very enjoyable to the taste buds.

"Ah, this is really great. Is it Mariya-senpai's mother who made this? Unlike my own mother, this cooking is wonderful."

Her interest piqued, even Shizuka took a portion of the fried egg to try out, but the answer to the question shocked everyone.

"Ah, no. My mother didn't make this. I made it myself. It's wonderful that it suited everyone's tastes."

"Mariya's cooking is pretty good... Do you make your own lunch every morning?"

"Something like that, however since I used some of the leftovers from my mother's cooking last night, it doesn't really count as my own exclusive work."

"Well, still it's quite amazing. Compared to my house... it's very different."

Godou spoke extremely impressed.

And then he glanced at the younger sister beside him.

"What now, Onii-chan, your expression is saying something."

"Let me make this clear, Godou, the cooking that Arianna does is something prepared specifically for me the master. Don't forget that."

Shizuka was feeling indignant about her lack of cooking talent, while Erica was simply selfishly throwing out her own willful comment.

Compared to these two, Mariya seemed much more noble no matter how you looked at it.

By the way, it was completely different from Godou who had tried very hard to knead the rice balls with the appropriate amount of force.

"Once you get used to it, it doesn't feel so amazing right? If you'd like, I can share some tips on how to prepare food quickly."

"That sounds quite interesting. Thanks. If possible, those two should—"

Godou turned his head around to find Shizuka glaring angrily at her brother, while Erica was deliberately averting her gaze and staring at birds flying in the sky.

Yuri and Godou could not help but look at each other and smile .

Part 3

'Hoho, lunch together at noon, good job! Though this is just a small step, but it will matter a lot in the future. Please continue doing your best like this.'

"Yes, yes..."

Yuri was talking to Amakasu on her cellphone in her room at the Nanao Shrine.

After returning from school, it was almost dusk. Yuri called Amakasu to report the day's results and to discuss some concerns.

'In the end, you went with cooking for him, and developing into a heart racing event of having lunch together. Looks like you have to continue working hard for this... Ah, did you look at the materials beforehand?'

"Yes, yes, I took a look."

Back at the Nanao Shrine after school, Amakasu had given an envelope to Yuri which seemed to contain reports.

In it were a thick stack of documents with a suspicious report title of 'The Difficulties of Approaching Males by Females Who Were Not Straightforward: Analysis and Solutions?'

'Those were just some hastily summarized materials prepared last night. How were they? Any reference value?'

"Are, are these written by Amakasu-san!? I seriously read all the lines and dialogues written in there, but that kind of method for expressing affection! How could one utter those shameful words!"

Recalling the content of Amakasu's special report, Yuri's face went red.

—Here, lunchbox. Last night I accidentally made too much, throwing it away would be a waste.

—Don't misunderstand! I definitely don't like you, there's nothing to it at all!

—You idiot brother, you don't understand how I feel...!

And so on...

'Hahaha, that's very important. Since ancient times, we Japanese have been very subtle in our ways of love. It should feel something like the case of Lady Aoi in "The Tale of Genji"?'

"Eh? It should feel something like that?"

'No no. That Genji had inexplicable attributes like Oedipus or lolita complexes which are no good. A normal male would definitely fall for the slightly older tsundere childhood friend who was the young mistress of a high class family and betrothed to him . Decidedly, Sakurano Youko was an adorable existence, but the current trend is towards older women fetishes!'

"I have no idea what you are talking about, could you please translate!"

This kind of idiotic conversation had no meaning at all. Yuri decided to change the topic.

"So, Amakasu-san, about the grimoire yesterday—"

'Ah ah, about that. Are there any concerns?'

"Yes, if it's possible, could you let me take a second look at that book?"

'...That I don't mind, however, is it related to you fainting yesterday?'

"Yes. However, I can't explain it clearly at this stage, but I seemed to have witnessed a strange hallucination at the time. Just to be careful, I'd like to confirm by having another look—"

Things would become serious if the name Sasha Dejansstahl Voban was mentioned.

Due to these concerns, Yuri only described things in a vague manner.

'Ah, I don't really want to be lectured by the shrine elders for the same thing two days in a row... Oh well, sure, after all we were the ones who involved Yuri-san in the first place. Since you agreed to assist us, I have no reason to refuse you.'

Unexpectedly understanding, Amakasu appended a sentence.

'Regrettably, I will be busy later so I will arrange for someone else to drive you there and back in my stead, please wait at the shrine for a little while.'

—Thirty minutes later.

Yuri walked down the stone steps of the Nanao Shrine and headed towards the shrine entrance.

Wearing her miko outfit, Yuri got on the locally manufactured sedan provided by the History Compilation Committee that was waiting for her. Since she intended to return immediately after using her spirit vision, there was no need to change her clothes.

After being shaken in the back seat for forty minutes, she finally arrived at the library in Aobadai.

After some polite words with the History Compilation Committee member who drove her here, Yuri got off and went to the entrance.

—Why?

The building felt even quieter than yesterday.

Precisely because it was a library, having peaceful surroundings was natural. Was she becoming a little neurotic? With a slightly worried feeling, Yuri entered the library.

At the reception hall.

Yesterday, there were several bored History Compilation Committee members sitting around. This was to prevent unauthorized people from entering, by force if necessary.

However, all these people were absent. Did they all go on a break?

Yuri felt a sense of foreboding and anxiety as she continued onwards.

The spacious corridor, the reading room on the first floor, the stairs. There was not a single soul in sight.

Come to think of it, should there not be a guide to substitute for Amakasu? Furthermore, no one came to receive Yuri.

As if trying to dispel the sense of worry and loneliness, Yuri quickened her footsteps. She tried to find another person amongst the shelves and in the corners of the reading room that housed tens of thousands of books.

However, there was none. Yesterday there had been a few library staff, and Amakasu was present. However, today there was no one at all—

Hurrying to the second floor, Yuri felt relieved at the sight of a human figure.

"Excuse me, what is going on today? I felt surprised that there were no other people here..."

As she spoke her greeting, Yuri began to lower her voice.

Yuri discovered that the person was white, literally as white as snow—face, limbs, body, everything was white.

Salt.

—Legends tell of a city which incited the wrath of God and all inhabitants were transformed into pillars of salt.

The person Yuri discovered was the same. The roughly thirty-year-old man was nothing more but a solid piece of salt now .

With intense fear, Yuri began to run.

Without any idea of where in the library she was, Yuri ran with all her strength.

—And then, she finally discovered.

Pillars of salt stood in the spacious reading room. No, there were between ten to twenty History Compilation Committee members who had been turned into salt.

Behind them stood a tall old man.

Of course.

Yuri knew. The power to turn live humans into solid salt, the emerald colored evil eyes which changed the living into inorganic material. There was only one person in the world possessing such an authority.

"Finally found you, miko. It must be you, the one who had the strongest wolf's hallucination in this area through the [Wolf]'s

book from unknown origins. It wouldn't have been possible without that kind of excellent talent."

That wise appearance was probably never forgotten. However, this was not his true nature.

Ferocious and hideous, with a violent and wild nature. The position of ruler gave him a very effective disguise to cover up those characteristics.

"How nostalgic, that face, I seem to recall seeing it before—this girl, what's her name, Kranjcar?"

The one the old man asked was not Yuri.

It was the one waiting quietly by his side, the girl with the slim figure. Her silver hair tied into a ponytail, a tense expression on her face, and a kind of rigid eastern European beauty.

"She should be called Mariya Yuri, Marquis. However, for the sake of obtaining one girl, isn't what you have done here going a bit too far?"

"Hohoho, the Milanese blue knight turns out to be surprisingly stubborn."

The blue knight—was quite an apt description for her appearance.

Long sleeved black t-shirt and miniskirt with frills. Black tights, a blue cape, and a jacket with blue and black vertical stripes—the description reflected these elements well.

Doesn't it feel similar to the red and black jacket that Erica wore ?

"Heh, to be honest—I love conflict. Hunting is good, games are not bad, and I also like random violence. That's why, I just want to do as I like at this time, do you understand?"

The old man joyfully spoke to the girl who showed a slight dissatisfied expression.

"Hoho, by the way, I don't like dogs. Seeing obedient dogs who only try to garner favor makes me want to puke. I love wolves however, I love the way they bare their fangs as they try to resist. Without a certain level of ambition, it would be pointless to keep by my side. In other words, you are one of my favorite wolves, Kranjcar."

"The honor is all mine, Marquis."

He smiled at the rigid tone of voice and mannerisms, then turned his body to face Yuri.

"Miko, from now on you will belong to me, and become part of my property. Understood?"

The monarch possessing the evil eye and the power to determine people's life and death. The man who called forth evil wolves and ruled over violent storms. Sasha Dejanstahl Voban.

To meet the oldest Devil King once again after four years, Yuri trembled with fear all over her body.

Part 4

It was at Aoyama in the Minato ward of Tokyo.

A grocery shop named Kogetsudou was located in a narrow street intersecting with the main street in Aoyama.

Within this shop sold all sorts of things from Taiwan, Hong Kong, mainland China, southeast Asia, and India. Even things from the northern and southern borders of Europe. The shop owner had a habit of buying all sorts of goods from everywhere and this resulted in them being piled high within the shop.

"So, that book really came from that place eh, so why did you put up such a dangerous thing for sale?"

Amakasu Touma spoke as he stared at a shelf near the cash register.

By the way, for some reason it was crammed with all sorts of booklets such as comics and the like.

"Those? They were rare resources passed down by some magi from who knows where, wouldn't it be a shame for them to go to waste? ...The sale at the auction was just about complete. It would have gone for a good price too, if it weren't for the unnecessary intervention of you guys."

The one answering was the female shop owner in a kimono.

Aged roughly twenty or so, and wearing Meisen silk with a simple cutting. The cashier was reading Chinese comics published in Hong Kong while receiving customers.

Amakasu did not know the original name of this shop and didn't care to find out.

She was the suspicious merchant who used the trademark [Kogetsudou] as an alias. A mysterious and very skilled wizard. Knowing these details were enough.

"Anyway, Amakasu-san, how did the appraisal go? We exhausted all avenues to determine its origin, and we are very interested in what kind of dangerous consequences came back with the results."

"Since it is classified information, I'm sorry I can't comment."

"Then, is that rumor true? Isn't there a girl with extremely acute vision amongst the current Hime-Miko? If we had someone with talent like that, then we wouldn't have so much trouble finding treasures."

"Well, what should I say, compared to that, what is the deal with that grimoire?"

Amakasu tried to evade Kogetsudou's questioning.

The very young but completely complacent woman and the indifferent young man exchanging information—these two were representatives of their respective factions.

The History Compilation Committee members are the 'official' organization for supporting wizards.

As for the 'commoner' wizards—they were the descendants of onmyouji and curse experts popular before the Meiji Restoration, and many of them secretly lived around Aoyama.

Kogetsudou counts as a central figure in that faction.

Perhaps possessing even more dangerous rare books than the werewolf grimoire, Amakasu's visit to the shop also included a hint to warn her to be careful.

"That, Amakasu-san, please wait a moment. I still have something else I want to ask, is that fine? If you tell me, you can have the thing you are currently reading for free."

"...If it's just the reward for some gossip, then it doesn't really matter. Let me check out the content first."

Amakasu replied as he continued to read the battle manga about the hero armed in steel and the iron-masked genius villain scientist time travelling in sixth century England.

"Then be my guest—Erica Blandelli, what is that kind of major character doing appearing in Japan?"

"She just came to study abroad, that's all."

"There was a massive electrical outage incident on the day that girl arrived. The History Compilation Committee members were all busy manipulating news sources and even interfered with things written on the internet."

"Coincidence, it just happened by chance."

"Destruction of buildings and the Shuto Expressway isn't just some kind of joke. Do you know how many tens of billions of damages occurred that night? ...And finally, the seventh Campione turning out to be Japanese, hasn't the joke gone too far?"

"...Well, all rumors, you can't believe everything you hear."

Admitting it's the truth to himself, Amakasu put the manga magazine away in his bag.

Looks like there was no need to hide from her the fact that Kusanagi Godou is the real thing. Furthermore, there was no meaning in trying to cover up the truth for those in the know. Moreover, if the source of these rumors became broadened, it may come to be useful.

"Then how about Liliana Kranjcar—the [Sword Fairy] coming to Japan, is it related to that? Will it develop into another major incident?"

"Liliana Kranjcar? From that Bronze Black Cross?"

Hearing a name he knew but did not expect, Amakasu's expression stiffened.

The two magic associations ruling over Milan's mage scene.

The Copper Black Cross—organization of the red devils, and the Bronze Black Cross—organization of the blue berserkers.

The former was represented by the young genius Erica Blandelli—the glamorous young woman deeply involved with Kusanagi Godou. Amongst those of the same age, it was said that only one person could rival this girl as her opponent.

Her name was—

"Our sources obtained the latest news that yesterday, Liliana and a gloomy old man arrived at Tokyo Narita Airport, did you know that?"

The owner of Kogetsudou smiled like a kitten.

At that moment, Amakasu's phone began to vibrate in his pocket.

"Thank you for your valuable information. Anyway, something came up."

Exchanging a few pleasantries with the shop owner, Amakasu left the shop and immediately picked up the phone.

"...Yes? Dejanstahl Voban?"

This name rendered Amakasu dumbstruck in shock, even more than when he heard a witch's name earlier.

Mariya Yuri had been kidnapped by Eastern Europe's Campione.

For an instant, Amakasu felt his mind freeze when he received the news from the Committee member. How could such a situation be resolved?

Amakasu could not help but look up at the sky and feel compelled to pray to God.

Chapter 4 - Conference of the Kings

Part 1

Magic originated in Europe.

This was correct from a geopolitical standpoint, but not quite accurate in terms of cultural anthropology.

The strange techniques of magic and wizardry have existed in the culture of every country in the world. The majority of powerful magic associations did start in Europe, but that does not mean that their local magic is the most proper or mainstream.

In fact, even in recent times, many western magi have devoted their efforts to researching eastern philosophy and civilization.

Take for example yoga, the Indian mystic art which relied mostly on incantations. Chinese wizardry included Taoism, Feng Shui, or the doctrine of the Five Elements.

Japan, the land of the warrior, was also a suitable research subject that enamored many western magi, and the eight million kami[10] unique to Japanese spiritual faith was also a popular topic of research.

...Unexpectedly, the Mariya family also had close dealings with those kinds of foreign researchers.

The Mariya family were originally courtiers in Kyoto, but due to vast differences in stature, they were neither prestigious nor wealthy.

This blood line produced many women with exceptional spirit powers over the generations.

The current generation's Yuri was also the same, and like the other girls who were entrusted to shrines and monasteries to work as nuns or miko. This tradition had been going on for the past few centuries.

Due to this blood line, the family had substantial influence in religious and wizardry related areas.

Also during the Meiji and Showa eras, there was a Mariya family elder who was granted the title of baron, and was a socialite who took an interest in western culture.

Westerners—had many dealings with those with knowledge about magic.

The Mariya family provided hospitality to researchers who visited Japan for their studies, and facilitated their research. If the guests came from Europe, they would even take them out to tour and have fun if the opportunity arose.

Hence, though it appeared that Yuri grew up in a traditional Japanese environment, in reality she was well accustomed to interacting with foreigners.

Daily conversation could be handled in English, and she had the experience of visiting Europe a couple of times.

...Due to this family situation, it was somewhat ironic that it created an opportunity for her to be imprisoned by Sasha Dejanstahl Voban.

"It was four years ago when I invited you and the others to Austria, how nostalgic."

Voban narrowed his eyes as he spoke.

They were in the library reading room that he had taken over by force. Crossing his legs, he sat on a rough lead pipe chair. However, the way he sat was like a monarch sitting on a royal throne.

Condescending and rude, arrogant and grand—

"I was extremely bored that time, and was trying to get a good hunt, however, I seem to have become a little too famous, and the [Heretical Gods] are not coming out. Unwilling to show themselves to me, this has been one of my headaches."

The only ones listening to him were Yuri and Liliana Kranjcar.

Voban's attitude and tone were very calm, but his personality was the opposite. In fact, his actions were often extremely selfish and full of blasphemy.

"I have several privileges, and one of them includes the right to choose my hunting prey... However, I have no interest in hunting rats. Only the strong are worthy of being hunted by me."

He laughed.

The Devil King who had slaughtered many gods was showing a hideously distorted smile with his lips.

As terrifying power flowed out continuously from his tall thin body, light flashed from his sharp emerald evil eyes like the irises of a ferocious tiger.

"A deity suitable to be my prey—this was a problem I had yet to solve that time. The mysterious ritual to summon a [Heretic God]... If this ritual succeeds, then I should be able to enjoy myself for a while—"

The incident four years ago—recalling his anger when Salvatore Doni snatched away the summoned god, Voban's smile disappeared from his lips.

He turned his stern gaze towards empty space.

"I now want to make the same challenge as four years ago, so just like last time I need your cooperation—ah, but you don't have the right to refuse, because no one can refuse what I, Voban has decided."

Four years ago, in order to complete the [God Summoning] spell which was regarded by many high level magi as extremely

difficult, Voban had gathered talented miko from all around Europe, and used their miko powers to summon a god. Since it happened to be during the summer holidays, it turned out to be an unfortunate coincidence for the Mariya family who had been invited by friends in Austria.

A miko of Mariya's caliber was very rare even in Europe.

Which was why the subordinates of Voban immediately discovered her in their mission to capture talented miko, and determined her to be a worthy sacrifice to offer to the Devil King.

"Heh, after all you won't be able to escape, so just go with the flow and enjoy our hospitality, how's that?"

The Devil King's evil eyes glowed with green light.

Yuri felt terrified. Her legs—starting from below the knee were surrounded by a layer of faint light, and as they rapidly turned white all feeling was lost.

The evil eye authority which turned people into salt.

Right now, she was being targeted by that power. By transforming just a part of Yuri's body, it was as if Voban was trying to show off that he possessed the ability to control this authority with precision.

"Marquis, this joke has gone too far! If this girl dies, there is no other replacement."

"I'm not going to do something that stupid. But your suggestion has merit, to waste such rare excellent talent on a game would be a shame."

Voban lowered his gaze the moment Liliana gave her warning.

The legs, which had become white inorganic matter, immediately regained their original color and feeling was restored. Yuri felt relief from the bottom of her heart.

"One would not immediately behead the chicken that laid golden eggs... You have such a valuable disposition that I can't be sure how much will remain after your death, so please don't force me to try such an unnecessary experiment."

Voban smiled again.

This was a smile with a kind of humorous feeling, a smile full of jeer.

"My servants are all residents of graves, you wouldn't want to become like them, right?"

Voban whistled with his fingers.

A figure suddenly appeared behind his back.

Wearing a tattered jacket filled with countless open cuts. It seemed to be a once illustrious battle outfit, and there was some kind of crest embroidered on it.

On the belt secured around the waist was a sabre.

The helmet easily reminded one of a knight from the thirteenth or fourteenth century.

However, the greatest characteristic was the pallor of death. It was undoubtedly the face of a dead person, expressionless, hollow, and eyeballs with dilated pupils. The only difference from a real corpse was the lack of a rotting stench.

(—This is a [Dead Servant]!)

Yuri recalled one of Voban's authorities. The power to dominate those who died directly by his hand to become completely obedient servants.

If one were to resist him, that would be the end result.

This was probably even more horrible than being turned into salt. A dead person has no lifespan, and would never obtain peace once fettered by this old Devil King.

"The god who resurrected from death—restoring the body that was torn apart, retrieving life, and descending upon the underworld..."

Suddenly, words flowed out of Yuri's mouth.

The [Dead Servant] had provoked a reaction from her spirit sensing powers. A god's figure appeared from behind Voban's

back. It was a crowned god whose green skin was wrapped by many layers of bandages. Most likely, this was the god of life and death who was vanquished by this old man.

The god who ruled the cycle of life and was the consort of the mother earth goddess, and finally became the ruler of the underworld.

"Oh? You know how I usurped authority from this god?"

Voban asked with his eyes narrowed.

"Try explaining it. Show me the level of your power."

"No, no. She probably just suddenly thought of those words. Please don't be too concerned—"

"I will be the one to judge that! Silence is forbidden! Speak!"

Yuri's body shook at the roaring reproach.

"...The god whose divine body was killed, I know his name to be Osiris and an Egyptian deity."

Spell words were summoned by resonance between the powerful spirit vision and the god.

Consigned into speech, the spell words revealed the god's sacred name. Voban nodded, satisfied with what he has he heard.

"Truly amazing, choosing you was correct."

Voban smiled as if he was very happy. Every time Yuri saw the figure of that god, she felt crushed by despair.

Amongst the divinities of ancient Egypt, Osiris was considered one of the more powerful gods.

The father of Horus, the god of the harvest for the previous generation of kings. The goddess Isis who excelled at magic was his wife. Unable to return to the living world after his body was cut into fourteen pieces, he became the ruler of the underworld.

How could one face a monster who defeated a god like that?

Yuri could only feel despair, like a heavy burden weighing on her body—then she suddenly remembered the words he said yesterday.

'If something like that ever happens again, please call me earlier ...'

The sincere and kind words from the youth whose existence was similar to the old man before her eyes. He possessed the authority which allowed him to fly to those in need who called upon his name.

—But, no way.

Yuri thought he did not have a chance of winning.

Kusanagi Godou cannot defeat Sasha Dejanstahl Voban. Yuri understood deeply since she had made contact with both kings. Though both belonged to the level of Campiones, their difference in power was overwhelming.

The old man had already mastered his special powers, but the youth was still unskilled.

It would be like a kitten challenging a tiger, Yuri's spirit sense declared. If Kusanagi Godou fought with Sasha Dejanstahl Voban, the old Marquis would be the victor without a doubt.

In order to avoid getting Kusanagi Godou killed, Yuri did not call out his name.

Part 2

It was around dusk, and droplets of rain gradually began to fall from the cloudy sky.

Kusanagi Godou and Erica Blandelli were leaving Jounan Academy, and on the road home.

A few days ago during gym class, when Erica was playing baseball—rather, Erica had awakened her love for baseball by striking out all the boys. And then today after school, dragging the unwilling Godou along, she made an assault on the baseball club.

"—Come make a bet and see if any of you can hit a ball pitched by me!"

Erica challenged the official players of the baseball club loud and clear.

Godou pitied from the bottom of his heart the baseball club members whose curiosity was roused by the challenge.

Furthermore, the famed starting catcher of the baseball team was going to act as Erica's assistant today. In other words, Erica could pitch as much as she wants. The weak baseball club, which always lost in the first match in the qualifying rounds of the National High School Baseball Championship, had zero hope of winning.

Godou decided it would be safer to accompany Erica rather than go off to do something by himself.

Finally, he decided to step in by the time he witnessed Erica successfully striking out the eighth player in a row.

"Substitution! I will replace the next batter!"

Godou shouted at the ninth batter who was walking towards the batting position with tears in his eyes.

"Oh my, Godou, I feel like you are plotting something."

"Your atrocities stop here. Let me show you that an amateur is nothing but an amateur!"

Smiling on the pitcher's mound, Erica fearlessly faced Godou who picked up a metal bat.

The one-on-one battle between the pitcher and the batter—

First was a foul. Second was a strike. The third was caught by the catcher. The fourth was a ball.

Erica who had insisted on throwing straight pitches till now, suddenly threw an outcurve pitch. Furthermore, it was a high speed outcurve pitch as fast as a straight pitch!

Even a baseball club pitcher who set their goal on the National Championship would not be able to throw such a curveball so easily.

Though he was surprised by Erica's atypical athleticism, Godou still hit the ball. A sharp hit sending the ball flying beautifully between the third base and the shortstop.

...In reality, Godou had already predicted such a ball midway.

This morning, lying beside the pillow of the sleeping Erica, was a baseball comic based on real techniques. In addition, the comic was opened on a page which described the outcurve pitch in rigorous detail.

—Still, what if she really succeeded in that kind of pitch...

If she entered sports seriously, she would probably reach world class levels. What admirable talent.

Godou thought as he watched the dissatisfied face of Erica.

"Godou you broke my hard earned winning streak, can't you read the mood?"

"For someone who has played baseball seriously for nine years, I couldn't tolerate watching that any further! Even though I fully understand you are an amazing fellow, but please behave yourself. "

The two of them held an umbrella each as they walked home under the rain.

Before, they were only acquaintances during a visit to Italy, but it had become much different now. By the time Godou noticed, it had already progressed to a relationship where they saw each other throughout the day and walked side by side. The feeling of ill fate was clearly increasing.

Lately, Godou had many secret worries.

There were times when Erica's presence had a kind of femininity which exceeded all other girls from the same age. This feeling only happened when Godou was by her side.

As light as wind, without a single worry, a feeling that being together was the most natural thing in the world.

This was a bad omen. Perhaps if this situation with Erica became even more intimate, without warning there will come a day when Godou would no longer be able to refuse her advances...

"What is it now, Godou, you suddenly look so distracted, did you discover my new allure?"

Erica smiled all of a sudden.

A gorgeous and charming smile like a blooming flower of Japanese Camellia. It's true, such frequent close contact isn't going to work. Godou took a step to the side and decided to keep his distance away from Erica.

"No, it's nothing. Don't make random guesses."

"Oh, nothing huh? Ah, that's right, I just thought of something nice."

Erica gazed as Godou as if she had ulterior motives, and suddenly spoke. Closing the umbrella held on her right hand, she snapped the umbrella with both hands.

"Oh no, the umbrella is broken, what shall I do?"

"Hey! Didn't you just break it yourself, what are you talking about!?"

Erica was trying to lean close to Godou and take shelter from the rain under his umbrella.

Godou wanted to push her away, but realized it would be impossible to accomplish by strength alone. Desperate resistance would be futile. Erica hugged his left arm tightly and whispered in his ear.

BAKI!!

"Isn't this great? Two lovers sheltering from the rain together like this is quite nice? Unless you actually want to see me wet?"

"I'll lend my umbrella to you! Go away quickly!"

"But in that case, wouldn't you get drenched? Please hold the umbrella properly. Ah, the rain has dripped on my shoulder, could you come a bit closer?"

Without waiting for Godou's response, Erica leaned even closer.

Godou felt desperate as the warm and soft body pressed upon him.

Those proportions like a goddess and the stimulating sensations from the shape of the body transmitted through the school uniform. Furthermore, the breath blowing at his ear hinted how close her lips were.

Under such an atmosphere, Erica could very well be aiming for something like a kiss. Godou must escape as quickly as possible!

"Hey, stop it, Erica. This is in the middle of the road and there are many observers. Don't you think it's inappropriate for high school students on the way home from school?"

Since force will not work he had to try some other method, thought Godou as he frantically spoke.

"For lovers, this kind of behavior is perfectly acceptable. Ah, a kiss in the rain, it will be my first time. Same for Godou, right?"

An opponent that cannot be handled by little tricks.

Erica approached with her lips as she ardently spoke in a soft voice. Just as Godou made the decision to struggle from this witch and escape with all his strength.

"If you don't have enough umbrellas, how about I give you a ride? In return, I do hope you two can listen to my request."

Interrupted by a calm voice, Erica immediately separated herself from Godou's body.

A battle stance—Godou felt surprised that Erica had switched to a high state of alert. It greatly contrasted with her appearance of a girl who might cook while humming a tune.

Her gaze was directed towards a young man standing before them.

"My name is Amakasu Touma—have you heard of the History Compilation Committee? I do errands for that organization, pleased to meet you."

A man wearing a creased suit and carrying a black umbrella.

Wearing glasses, he gave off a 'good-for-nothing' kind of feel.

"Actually, we have a working relationship with Mariya-san. Last time during the incident with Athena, we provided a lot of help and support from the background."

Godou nodded.

The battle with Athena had plunged Tokyo into darkness and destroyed many public facilities. Godou had heard from Yuri that the History Compilation Committee had been busy throughout and after the incident, trying to control the spread of information.

"Uh, what do you mean? I don't quite understand, however, what is it that you want to ask me?"

"Godou, please don't act so friendly, he is probably one of those people who want to make use of your power."

"Well, that goes the same for you and me. We're both birds of a feather. Also, this time our interests are aligned."

Amakasu forced a smile at Erica's accusation. However, his expression became serious immediately.

"It's an emergency situation and time is of the essence. We wish to borrow your power—Mariya-san has been kidnapped and the culprit is Sasha Dejanstahl Voban. Are you aware of this?"

"...What!?"

Godou felt deeply shocked by this unexpected news. The name he heard mentioned yesterday and the fact that Yuri was kidnapped.

"Marquis Voban? I can hardly believe it. It would be plausible for him to go to China where his enemy Luo Hao was located. But coming to this island nation in the Far East, isn't that too strange? And what reason does he have to kidnap Yuri?"

Erica's tone of voice was contemptuous and clearly full of suspicion.

"It's not entirely without cause. That young lady actually knew the Marquis Voban from a long time ago. There was once an incident... Anyway, it is urgent right now, can you please put aside your doubts and come along with us?"

"Ok, where are we going?"

Godou answered immediately to Amakasu's humble request, without an instant of hesitation or pondering.

"Yes, I hope you can understand this sudden and suspicious request—the only one who can battle with a Campione is another Campione."

"I will help, so let's go to Mariya's location immediately."

"Uh, it's really ok?"

Amakasu felt surprised by Godou's immediate answer, as he was prepared to continue his words of persuasion.

Godou nodded, but Erica beside him frowned.

"Godou, please don't take in such lies so easily. Would you show a little bit of wariness please."

"I know. But how can I stay calm knowing that a friend is in danger?"

Erica's warning was correct. Though he didn't admit it, Godou agreed with her.

No matter what, he also had the 'news' provided from last night .

"Actually last night Salvatore Doni that brat called me. That busybody told me about the Marquis Voban coming to Japan, and though he was talking like an idiot the whole time, I'm sure Erica knows he is a guy who doesn't lie, right?"

"Sir Salvatore?"

Though he was a problematic character, but Salvatore Doni was not a man who lied.

A man who was totally useless when faced with deceptive situations. A complete failure of a man who would try to solve every problem with a sword.

"Well, if that's the case, then there should be no mistake. If that person revived then who knows when he might be coming to trouble Godou, don't be careless..."

"Yes, Erica. It might be troublesome if you got caught up in another conflict with a Campione, why don't we part ways here?"

Godou made a suggestion to the companion chattering away.

Last time the fight with Doni seemed to have brought Erica much trouble.

After all, he had become enemies with the Campione who was known as the [Chief] in Italy. The Copper Black Cross she belonged to had ordered all assistance provided to Godou to be terminated, but Erica ignored it.

The issue was not resolved, and the relationship with Doni entered a stalemate.

It could end up being another huge issue. The Balkan Devil King probably had a strong influence over the Copper Black Cross as well.

That place was unexpectedly close to Italy. However, Erica shook her head.

"Godou do you plan on abandoning me this number one knight and going to meet a Devil King? I will not follow such a stupid order. You are still unfamiliar with these matters, so why don't you just accept my help honestly?"

Godou scratched his head at that arrogant face.

Whenever Erica spoke like that, it was usually feigned stubbornness that stemmed from consideration for him. These feelings contained shyness and gratitude.

"Amakasu-san, right? So this is the plan, take us both to where that old man and Mariya are located. We will try our best."

"Thank you, King. Your assistance is greatly appreciated!"

Amakasu glanced at Godou and Erica separately, and lowered his head in a very pretentious manner.

It was almost like the motion of a comedic actor.

Part 3

Amakasu drove Godou and Erica to Aobadai.

A library located in a quiet residential neighborhood.

Godou felt perplexed that Voban and Yuri were at such a place. Why would it be a library—was his honest feelings about the matter.

Deciding to let Amakasu stand by in the parking lot, Godou and Erica stepped into the library.

—A sudden attack.

A figure clad in tattered clothing slashed at them with a sword.

"An enemy!"

"Leave it to me, Godou you go ahead."

It was the entrance to the library.

To be attacked at such a place by some weird swordsman, Godou felt that his life was still full of trials and tribulations. Godou smacked his lips as he tried to discern what kind of enemy it was.

Erica summoned her beloved sword Cuore di Leone and elegantly chopped down her opponent.

It was a man wearing some kind of long-hemmed clothing on his upper torso with a cape-like jacket. He was using a broad longsword skillfully like a master, but the face under the helmet completely lacked spirit and ambition.

Almost like a dead person—this thought made Godou shudder with horror.

In reference to games and movies, 'zombie' might be an apt description. Having thus named the new monster—

Another swordsman appeared before Godou.

"Oh, another one!?"

Wearing the same attire as the first, another corpse-like swordsman was charging towards them.

Erica only gave a glance.

When she knocked down the first one, Erica held the advantage, but she did not expect things to end so quickly. As expected, another one came along attacking.

She successfully dodged using pure reflexes, but could not evade the second strike of the tachi[11]!

Godou believed so as he kicked forwards.

Godou used the essential actions of a forward kick to send the (clearly) dead person's body away. As he faced the second attacker, Godou felt disgust at the increasingly powerful defensive and offensive capabilities of his own body.

"Godou, please hold on for a while, I will take care of them soon enough."

"Then I'll thank you beforehand... To be honest I don't think I can take any of them alone."

Godou answered with a troubled expression to Erica's encouragement. This was because the authority obtained from the god of war Verethragna could not be used without numerous troublesome conditions.

A sword master far beyond his own capabilities, but was not someone with unnatural strength like a brown bear, or several tons of heavy body mass, and definitely not an evil criminal oppressing the populace.

In such a case, Godou had no chance of victory.

Godou hurriedly retreated, planning on maintaining a distance.

Only a few steps away from the sword. The instant deciding whether to wait or to go on the offensive.

"Death knight who possesses an extraordinary history, please forgive my pointing my blade at you—however, that important person there is the king we magi respect, and no amount of insolence will be tolerated."

The girl's awe-inspiring voice resounded.

A cute but non-seductive voice full of sweetness, it reminded one of quality steel—tough yet flexible.

"The crownless king engaging in suspicious investigations, please listen to the pledge of the knight Liliana Kranjcar."

The owner of the voice was a young maiden, approaching with casual footsteps.

She possessed a silver ponytail, and a rigid beauty like a western doll. Furthermore, her slim figure was like a beautiful fairy. A girl who carried a surreal atmosphere around her.

"I am the inheritor of the berserker's stone tablet, the descendant of the crusading knights. My heart speeds across the sky. Winged king of the knights, appear in my hand with the essence of dreams! "

A silver sabre appeared in the hand of the girl who introduced herself as Liliana.

The sword was slender and elegant, drawing gentle curves.

"Come, the foundation of my might, Il Maestro!"

Wearing a cape with blue and black vertical stripes, her blue and black battle outfit greatly resembled the red and black upper garments worn by Erica.

Liliana exhaled and stepped forward.

Holding her sword she cut her way into the space between the second death knight and Godou.

"Ah Lily, when did you come to Japan? It's been so long!"

Erica seemed to know the girl armed with the sabre.

First using a feint with her sword to confuse the first death knight, Erica casually sent a second horizontal slash at her opponent's body.

After receiving such a blow, the death knight's body turned into ash and scattered upon the ground.

"Do not act so friendly, Erica Blandelli, I am not your friend, and there is no reason for you to call me like that."

Though they knew each other, it seemed like they didn't have a good relationship. Liliana was responding with an unyielding tone of voice.

"Are these dead people the servants of the Marquis Voban?"

"Yes, have you heard of [Dead Servants]? They were released by the Marquis to take care of intruders—knowing your existences, they will definitely come to you looking for trouble!!"

While talking to Erica, Liliana continued to watch her own opponent with vigilance.

The second death knight attacked her straight on. At the same time, Liliana also swung her sabre downwards in front of her.

Sword struck sword violently.

One would have expected the sword guards to clash, but it did not happen. Using some kind of technique, Liliana advanced forward while using her sabre to deflect the death knight's sword.

A flash of the sword.

Slashed open by a diagonal cut, the death knight also turned into ash. Crumbling like a sand castle on a beach, he disappeared in a dry manner.

"...Thank you, I'm saved."

"No, this level completely cannot count as a crisis for a Campione. I want to apologize for making a [King] dirty his hands fighting a death knight. Please grant your forgiveness."

Godou wanted to thank Liliana who saved him from a tough situation, but ended up receiving an apology.

Erica laughed to herself from the side.

"What are you talking about, Lily, you probably joined in happily to relieve your accumulated stress anyway."

"Quiet, I do not have any accumulated stress. Do not make things up."

Liliana frowned as she spoke.

What kind of relationship did these two have? Godou listened to their dialogue with great interest.

"I know, you were at the place the Marquis lived, and likely came along together, right? It is true that your grandfather is a worshiper of the Marquis, and to think he even sent his own granddaughter away so easily."

Hearing Erica's speculation, Liliana's face changed. The hunch was likely right on target.

"However, knowing your overly righteous attitude and the rumored character of the Marquis, you definitely do not get along, and there are many things you cannot speak out against. Isn't that a lot of stress?"

"Be-be-be-be quiet! Do not talk like you saw it with your own eyes!"

Liliana tried to prevent Erica from speaking further with a brusque voice.

...Perhaps, this girl was another victim who Erica played around with. Godou couldn't help but feel a sense of camaraderie with Liliana.

Looking so innocent, it was clear that she was no match for Erica.

"—Kusanagi Godou, there is absolutely zero basis in the things your lover is saying. Please forget them. Yes, I am the follower of the Marquis Voban, however, as a knight there is nothing dishonorable about it. No, without a doubt, absolutely none!"

"Ah, I get it."

Godou politely nodded his head at Liliana who was denying with her face red.

He also tried to correct a point of concern.

"By the way, Erica is not really anything like my lover. That, truly is baseless..."

"You do not have to cover it up. Our information network is already fully informed about your lustful depravity—no, pardon me, intimate relationship beyond the bounds of normal friendship. Given the skilled techniques of that female fox, playing around with a young king is easy beyond compare."

"Don't talk like I have been deceived by Erica, that information is wrong!"

Godou yelled reflexively in response.

"Excuse me. However, Sir Salvatore has stated 'that girl has cut in between Godou and I, and is very obstructive.' Besides, your denial is completely unconvincing..."

Liliana mentioned a name that could not be ignored.

How much more will that idiot create trouble for me? In his heart, Godou felt the rise of a sudden murderous impulse.

"So Lily, have you seen Sir Salvatore lately?"

"Do not call me Lily. Only on the day before I met the Marquis Voban—Sir Salvatore was still recuperating, and described what transpired that night with great detail. In addition, he also talked about you with great passion."

You—Liliana threw a glance at Godou as she spoke.

It felt like the kind of revulsion a girl obsessed with cleanliness would feel after seeing something hated.

"Ah, did that fellow say something strange?"

"...'It was a night I will never forget for the rest of my life. I absolutely cannot forget the night so passionate like a dream, and blindingly bright as summer fireworks. I offered my all to him, and he responded with everything he had. At that time, it felt like the world only contained the two of us, and all else was irrelevant.' Something like that."

At that moment, Liliana lowered her gaze, her cheeks blushing slightly.

"I am not qualified to comment on two [Kings] having that kind of immoral relationship, but if permissible, what I wish to say is, those kinds of impure actions with Erica are very unhealthy for a male. As for this kind of dishonest two-timing behavior... Ah, please forget what I just said."

"Don't have such weird misunderstandings, all I did was fight the guy!"

Uninterested in Godou's yelling, Erica spoke.

"I told you before, you have too many openings, which is why you let all these strange fellows approach you? People like Sir Salvatore, you need to drive them away with determination!"

"I want to drive them away too, but if they keep coming back for trouble, what can I do!"

After answering, Godou took a deep breath.

Salvatore Doni was such an infuriating man. Anyway, that wasn't important now, just forget about it, and devote all attention to solving the task at hand!

Determined, Godou asked Liliana.

"Uh, so that old man named Voban is inside, right? Can you take us there?"

"That was what I came to do. Please come this way."

Liliana walked towards the depths of the library. The meeting with the oldest Devil King was about to begin.

Part 4

Godou reached the second floor of the library and walked into the spacious reading room.

The tall old man and the white-clad Yuri were there.

Unlike the rumors of a mad dog, the old man's appearance was very intellectual, with a wide forehead and deep-set eyes. Though tall and lean, his body did not give an impression of being weak. Perhaps it was due to the upright posture of his entire back.

Wearing a neat suit, he seemed like an old gentleman.

"Kranjcar, you were very violent towards my servant."

The old gentleman—Sasha Dejanstahl Voban suddenly spoke.

It was not a reprimand, but held more of a mocking tone.

"My apologies, as a knight, I incorrectly judged insolence against the [King] and raised my sword. I will accept any punishment."

"Those kinds of servants are a dime a dozen, take no heed of it."

Answering as if playing around, Voban looked bored and gazed at Godou.

It was the kind of gaze which seemed rather arrogant.

"You look quite young, but come to mention it, I also became [King] around your age. Name yourself, youngster. I suppose you know my name already, but I do not know yours."

"My name is Kusanagi Godou. Please return my friend."

Godou reported his name without using honorifics.

After hearing about the exploits of this old man, Godou had no intention of applying his usual respect for elders.

Godou glanced at Yuri's condition. She looked a bit pallid, but it did not seem like she had suffered any serious attack. She was watching Godou's face with a worried expression.

"Why!? Kusanagi-san. Coming to this place because of me!"

"What are you saying, wouldn't it be problematic if I didn't come? Anyway, are you ok Mariya? Have they mistreated you?"

"I will not do anything that stupid, this miko is very useful to me."

Voban cracked his lips open to reveal a sarcastic grin.

"However, youngster, who is this girl to you? Family or wife? Or lover? I am sorry, but she will be mine."

"Don't joke around! If you want to summon a god, do it yourself ! Don't involve others!"

Before reaching here, Godou found out the gist of things from Liliana.

Whether Voban's goal, Yuri's necessity, or the dangers of the [Heretical God] summoning ritual. There was no reason at all to let this old man continue with his heinous acts.

Thus Godou reproached him loudly.

Voban yawned as if bored, and was completely unaffected.

"Youngster, this is a gathering of kings. I apologize for the rudeness of entering your territory without consent. However, do

not mistakenly believe that your words can change my intentions. If you request something from a [King], should you not prepare to pay the price?"

"Price?"

"Yes, a miko to replace this girl, and one that can summon a god to be my prey. Without this, there can be no deal."

The old man did not seem to want to waste words. It looked like negotiations could not continue.

Godou smacked his lips. Was there any way other than a show of force? According to rumors about Voban, he was a believer in [Power]. It seemed like there was no other way but to display the power he possessed—the authority usurped from the Persian Warlord.

Just as Godou was agonizing—

He noticed Yuri looking at him like she was begging him, as if silently pleading something.

—Was it due to anxiety?

Godou felt doubt, and released the right fist which had clenched subconsciously, and relaxed his shoulder.

Yuri nodded greatly, so the guess was correct.

(But then, how should it be done...)

Just now, the words 'use force' had crossed Godou's mind.

Was there no further meaning in talking with Voban?

Even if Yuri had not stopped him, it was something to be avoided.

He himself, the one who always preached to Erica about 'living a peaceful life with common sense,' should find an easier solution to the problem...

At this time, Erica took action.

Until now, she had been waiting in a corner of the reading room with Liliana. However, she seemed to have noticed Godou's hesitation, and walked over before the [King].

"...No good, the issue has become complicated, could you stand down?"

"No, my king. I apologize deeply for my tardiness. We better follow the advice of our ally Sir Salvatore—please be decisive."

With a glamorous smile refusing Godou's request, Erica provided counsel with the tone of voice of a loyal subject.

Voban immediately reacted to those words.

"Oh, an ally? This cannot be ignored, girl."

To the old Devil King who had taken a slight interest, Erica gracefully bowed and introduced herself.

"Honored to meet you. I am Erica Blandelli—the Great Knight of the Copper Black Cross, and the current [Diavolo Rosso]."

"Paolo Blandelli's successor? What was the meaning of what you just said? Could you explain it?"

"Yes, allow me to proceed."

Erica's pupils seemed to contain a certain brightness like a happy and naughty child.

Obviously there were no good intentions.

"I don't know if you have heard, but my master Kusanagi Godou and our Italian [King] Sir Salvatore had an intense battle that ended in a draw. Furthermore, this battle nurtured a bond of friendship between two [Kings]."

Godou could feel cold sweat from his back.

It was definitely said, that four years ago, the one who foiled the old man's plans was Salvatore Doni.

"Nothing was nurtured at all! We fought, yes, but there is nothing remotely similar to a good relationship!"

"Hoho, though my king says so, but he is definitely intimate with Sir Salvatore. Isn't that right, Liliana?"

"Why are you asking me? ...Yes, it is true."

Being asked so suddenly, Liliana answered rather displeasedly.

If you're not really friends with Erica then don't be so cooperative!

Godou yelled, but it was too late.

"Sir Salvatore is really concerned about Godou-sama's matters... Rather than an ally, perhaps he would be happier if it was described as something like a mutually loving or brotherly relationship."

From the sight of this, she must have been played thoroughly like a doll by Erica.

As he pitied Liliana, Godou raised his head and looked towards the sky.

"...Yes. To be confirmed by a knight of the Bronze Black Cross which is enemies with the Copper Black Cross, youngster—you are Salvatore's ally, there can be no mistake about that fact."

"In addition, there is one more thing about my master's victory a month ago. Would you like to know?"

Erica added more fuel to the fire.

Voban did not answer, but motioned for her to continue with his eyes.

"The goddess Athena—a powerful deity requiring no explanation. However, Kusanagi Godou fought and defeated her a

month ago, but let her escape just before the very end, and did not usurp any authority..."

"Ho, even if you are bluffing, please do not overdo it."

It changed.

Unlike the rumors, the old man full of intellectual airs changed his attitude. That posture was as sharp as swords, and as ferocious as charging wild beasts.

Sitting on the chair as if it was a throne, he started to shake lightly.

Soft motions of the body, like those of a feline beast. It was unthinkable that an old man could be producing them.

"You say he fought Salvatore to a draw and defeated Athena! But he has not even slaughtered a single god! Hahaha, to have accomplished all that, fighting that stupid fool with no other tricks than his sword, and making an enemy of the ultimate goddess of darkness? [Diavolo Rosso], what did Salvatore really say?!"

The old Devil King asked as he laughed with great mirth.

"Yes. That was what he said. As [King] as well as the senior visiting personally from afar, the Marquis would definitely want to have a competition of strength. He even said something about understanding about an elderly body, and something about bowing down in service to the power of the young..."

"Never! No matter how much that fellow messes around, he would never say something so ridiculous!"

However, it was too late.

Voban looked very happy, and was smiling mercilessly.

"Good. To make an opponent out of a brat who has not even been [King] for a year was not my mission. However—feel honored, for I will play along."

The emerald green eyes, were flashing brightly.

Eyes of a tiger. Godou felt himself out of breath as he thought of such a description for the intensity of those eyes.

"Brat—as you have requested, take this girl back. However, in exchange, you and the girl will become the prey for my hunt."

Voban violently grabbed Yuri's arm and threw her towards Godou.

Godou frantically received her delicate body in his arms.

Yuri's body was trembling slightly, her face pale and bloodless, as if extremely frightened. Godou lightly stroked her back with his hand to comfort her.

"Thirty minutes. Take this girl, and go wherever you want. I will set off from here thirty minutes later to take the lives of you and the girl. You can hide anywhere you want. I will pursue to the

corners of the world in order to hunt down and corner you. These are the rules of the hunt, understood?"

At this point, there was no other way but to play the game.

Godou prepared himself, and silently nodded.

Chapter 5 - Time of the Hunt

Part 1

The sun had already set, and night was falling.

Rain drops were falling rhythmically from the sky.

Godou supported Yuri and left the library with Erica, meeting Amakasu at the parking lot.

"It really did develop into this kind of situation... Anyway, let's get out of here for now, and plan as we move. Just sitting here is not going to solve anything."

Amakasu heard what happened, and urged Godou and the rest.

Developments have reached an emergency situation, will these actions turn out to be rash or foresighted?

Godou had yet to decide on a plan, so he went with Amakasu's suggestion.

"No matter what, things have gotten more and more troublesome..."

The domestic car aimlessly ran towards the Minato ward on the Shuto Expressway.

Godou sat in the front passenger seat and grumbled.

Obviously, Amakasu was in the driver's seat, while Erica and Yuri sat in the back.

"Let me make this clear, I only wanted to sum up the conversation quickly, and had no intention of putting Godou in danger. This matter should have been originally prepared for the battle against the Marquis Voban."

Erica said in a calm manner.

She was probably in a bad mood because Godou chose to sit in front instead of next to her.

"I know that, but there must be some slightly safer way to resist!
"

Godou tried to change his mood as he spoke, as there was no point in regretting something that had already happened

Try to think of a constructive way to minimize damage to the surroundings.

"Sigh, grumbling is meaningless, let's consider our direction from this point on—how many authorities does that old gramps have in total?"

"...Is it seven or eight?"

"There are also reports of nine, or even ten and above."

Godou frowned at Amakasu and Erica's vague responses.

"Can you answer clearly? Aren't there magic associations investigating our abilities and making reports? That name is something like..."

"The Greenwich Assembly."

Amakasu answered while gripping the steering wheel.

"However, that group only started their activities in the latter half of the nineteenth century. That is why they don't have information on people who became Campiones earlier like the Marquis Voban. Thus, detailed information is only available on those who became [Kings] in the twentieth century or later, like Salvatore Doni and the Black Prince Alec."

"Information on Marquis Voban aside, even the god he first defeated is completely unknown. Some say that it is a god associated with wolves—probably a god with earth attributes."

Erica's supplementary explanation reminded Godou of the information he received from that phone call.

"Come to think of it, that fellow Doni also has all sorts of disparate authorities. It feels like there is no sense of unity."

Godou frankly injected his comment.

The other two became silent in the middle of their explanations, and turned their gazes towards Godou as if they had something to say.

"Wha-what is it?"

"No... if you say so, then nothing."

"I think that the embodiment of Verethragna is also a bunch of random abilities."

True, that was something not really worth comparing, so Godou decided to cut back on the unnecessary comments.

"Then let's return to the topic just now, and decide on how to proceed from here. If we cannot avoid fighting against that old gramps, I want to do it somewhere to minimize collateral damage. "

"I see. If helping Yuri-san is the first priority, then there is no other way."

Amakasu spoke as he looked ahead.

The rain splattering on the windshield had intensified, and it was raining quite heavily.

"However, do note that handing Yuri-san over as a sacrifice is a possible solution. From a personal standpoint I think it is a tragic option, but in the interests of public welfare, it is the best choice."

"Please don't say something so stupid in front of the person being discussed. There's no way I'll pick that method."

Godou immediately rejected Amakasu's irrelevant words.

This young man always put on frivolous airs, but made shockingly cruel suggestions.

"But if we really do that, Marquis Voban will be satisfied and will leave Tokyo immediately. There won't be any other innocent victims, isn't that appropriate?"

"I understand your reasoning. But I refuse!"

However, the one who opposed Godou was not the originator of the plan.

"Kusanagi-san, Amakasu-san's suggestion is correct."

Yuri, who had been silent all along, finally spoke.

Bowing her head down depressed, however, she suddenly looked up and entered the conversation.

"If you don't hand me over, Kusanagi-san and the Marquis' battle—will bring severe tragedy to Tokyo. Did you know? There are legends about the Marquis summoning great storms to destroy cities, and releasing wolves to level villages."

Yuri's stern voice carried determination.

She was no longer afraid, and quietly spoke with an expression of sorrow.

"The only one the Marquis insists on having is me. Fortunately, the Marquis only intends for me to help him finish the ritual, so he should not do anything else to mistreat me. It will be fine."

Yuri was smiling as if trying to comfort the others.

An illusory smile which showed great strength. Godou lightly sighed. Such acting skills must have been difficult for her who lacked competence in either sports or technology.

"Will there be any danger?"

"Four years ago, there were about thirty miko participating in the Marquis' [Heretical God] summoning. After the ritual, roughly two thirds of them suffered severe mental trauma, and most went mad and lost their sanity."

In the instant he heard Erica's fluent answer, Godou made his decision.

—Ok, let's do it this way.

"In the battle against Athena, Yuri risked her life to use her power to provide assistance, and took on a dangerous and irreplaceable role in order to force the goddess to retreat from Tokyo."

Kusanagi Godou owed Mariya Yuri an extremely great favor.

"That ritual is very famous for summoning [Heretical Gods] with that level of sacrifice. Honestly speaking, I was quite

surprised to find out that Yuri had participated in that ritual before . I suspect Yuri was only safe because she was the most capable out of the many miko, but she is unlikely to be so lucky next time."

"In that case no, not allowed. Mariya's proposal is rejected."

Feeling his battle spirit fired up, Godou quietly said.

Campiones—just because one was the [King], can one do as one pleased? No way! Towards Voban's tyranny, Godou's sense of resistance gradually grew.

It was completely unacceptable to let this girl be involved in such dangers due to that old man's personal whims.

"So, Mariya, did you consider carefully before deciding to follow that old gramps? Really seriously considered from the depths of your heart?"

"...Seriously considered."

Yuri answered curtly, but with her head bowed.

Godou turned around and looked at her straight in the face.

"You are lying. This is Mariya's benevolent lie."

"Nothing like that, I did consider carefully—!"

"Just like the time with Athena, you thought that it would be fine if you were the only sacrifice, right? I decided then, if anything like that ever happens again, Mariya will definitely try to sacrifice herself—but that is something I definitely will not allow."

His body became hot.

A Campione's body will easily enter an optimal state during times of crises. This is the power supporting Godou's battle ability.

"If you fight with the Marquis, another cruel disaster will occur, so please calm down!"

"I am calm, don't worry. Even if the opponent is a horrific Campione, he is not a god and cannot create a world of darkness like Athena. There should be ways to deal with him."

"But then, in that case Kusanagi-san will... please consider yourself."

Her shoulders dropping, Yuri murmured weakly.

"If-if anything happens to you—no, in a fight against the Marquis, something will definitely happen. If Kusanagi-san gets killed because of me, I..."

Her words lost form and were no longer distinguishable from one another.

Yuri completely lowered her head, her shoulders shaking, and tears streamed down her face, moistening the dress of her Japanese outfit.

—This strong-willed girl was crying.

Yuri who had once faced Athena alone without regard for her own safety, was now clearly crying. It was most likely due to Godou's risking his life for her.

If it was simply her own matter, Yuri could definitely hold back her tears.

Nevertheless, this only made Godou strengthen his determination. No matter what, he must protect this girl, Mariya Yuri, and stop the willful actions of that unsavory old man!

"Yuri you should just give up. This is the decision of the [King]. Saying any more will be futile. Don't forget, this man is [King], and a very stubborn, violent person."

In direct contrast with the Hime-Miko who cried audibly, Erica beside her was very calm and collected.

She smiled calmly and asked.

"Of course, the Marquis you requested to follow is also a king, so which side you pick is your freedom. Which will it be? The Marquis or Godou, who do you choose?"

"But Kusanagi-san has no chance of winning the Marquis. Though both are Campiones, the Marquis has a clear advantage in both the strength and number of authorities. Kusanagi-san is too optimistic!"

Yuri lifted her tear-stained face and scolded.

But Godou's determination could not be shaken, and Erica simply shrugged.

"What are we going to do, my master?"

"If we talk about chances of victory, my authorities from Verethragna shouldn't be able to win against Athena either. Anyway, we have no other choice at this point."

Godou turned to face Amakasu on the driver's seat.

"So that's it, Mariya's person will be handled by me. I will never hand her over to that old gramps, so please, drive to somewhere with fewer people. A battle scene here would bring even more trouble."

"Understood. To be kidnapped by two Campiones one after the other, Yuri-san sure is an important person."

"Ah, Amakasu-san, what are you talking about!"

Yuri reprimanded the gloating Amakasu.

However, the frivolous representative continued to man the steering wheel unaffected.

"But regrettably, I am a member of the History Compilation Committee. As someone involved in this field, I cannot oppose the will of the great Devil King, oh... It's like running away on a stolen bike, a kind of guilty excitement."

"You! Always taking things so lightly!"

Yuri finally was angered, but it totally swept away her sorrow and tears.

Godou nodded at her new condition.

Once everything was settled, she would probably scold him like last time after the Athena incident. But that's fine. Compared to letting this girl be taken away out of sight to a distant location, it was ten thousand times better.

Purely by chance, his gaze met with Erica's.

His companion calmly made a look, as if saying she had no objections.

"Unfortunately, I will be troubling you."

"Don't worry, didn't I already say? Having offered you my [Sword], I already prepared myself for situations like this. And that old [King]'s history is not something you can comprehend alone, let me fill you in later."

Erica casually spoke, and then turned her jeering gaze forwards—to the young man in the driver's seat.

"...Well, I feel like it is correct to predict this kind of possibility, but I'm just a little concerned about the speaker telling Godou that."

"Don't talk like I have ulterior motives."

As they were about to continue, the sound of rolling thunder was heard.

The location of the thunderstrike seemed quite near. Looking out the window, the night sky was filled with dark clouds, and the rain was increasing continually.

"...In other words, thirty minutes have passed."

As Amakasu glanced at his watch, gray shadows immediately appeared.

Part 2

Running.

Under the intense thunder and rain, groups of gray shadows were running.

Shadows—no, if one looked carefully, those were the silhouettes of wolves. They numbered about thirty or forty.

A pack of wolves colored gray like a rat's fur.

But the wolves' sizes were abnormal, for their tall and well-built bodies could easily be mistaken for a horse's.

A pack of giant wolves was galloping down the Shuto Expressway with horrific speed, chasing Godou's car from behind.

...Surprisingly, the distance between them was shrinking.

There was still about thirty meters, but they would catch up soon.

"So these are the [Wolves] called by that old gramps? These are complete monsters."

"I am also seeing them for the first time. The Marquis is able to call forth hundreds of these [Wolves] and can easily eradicate ten to twenty villages or towns with them."

Watching the ferocity of the wolf pack from the rear window of the car, Godou and Erica exchanged opinions.

Extremely ravenous wild beasts as if they had discovered their prey.

Perhaps one could understand with the following description. A pack of wolves whose eyeballs raged with the color of blood as they drooled and chased violently.

"Come to think of it, there seems to be a lack of cars in the approaching direction. What could be the reason..."

Godou muttered as he realized his carelessness.

Though traffic was not heavy today, the number of cars on the Shuto Expressway could not be zero. In fact, there should be cars in front and cars from behind trying to pass.

But starting five minutes ago, the number of cars around them became very few.

This wasn't strange. If a normal driver saw those kinds of monsters running on the roads, they would definitely make way for them. This wasn't hard to imagine.

"Let's hope those wolves haven't caused any serious incidents..."

Godou could only pray to the heavens.

The gray wolves were probably only targeting Godou and Yuri and should be ignoring the other cars. Hence, that worry seemed unlikely. But still, they should prepare for the worst.

...In a car collision, those wolves would probably send the car flying instead.

"Amakasu-san, please stop the car! Don't involve unrelated people!"

"I refuse to stop, but we should definitely avoid a chase in a place like this."

After being told by Yuri, Amakasu turned the steering wheel.

It was at the Kokuchou interchange on Route 3 of the Shuto Expressway.

Amakasu directed the car into the lane towards the exit leading to street level.

"Are you planning on driving on the streets? That is very dangerous!"

"If we get attacked by those monsters while driving at such a speed, the result will be tragic! Since they will catch up sooner or later, it will be easier to escape at ground level."

Of course, this reasoning had its merits, so Godou immediately responded to Amakasu's suggestion.

"Then please let us off at a suitable spot, and then try to think of a solution!"

—Ten minutes later, Amakasu had driven the car into the streets in the neighborhood of Roppongi district.

This was the city center containing high-rise buildings, luxury hotels and television stations, with shrines, monasteries and embassies slightly further away.

"...Could you stop the car over there?"

Due to the intense rain beating down on the windows, it was difficult to see outside clearly. Godou still managed to find a good spot and proceeded to alert Amakasu.

Turning at an intersection, they stopped before a primary school.

A city center primary school. Neither the playground nor its overall area were very big, but it should be enough to rampage a bit. Since it was night, there will not be any children.

Godou had Amakasu stop the car and got out onto the road.

The storm was very fierce.

As the raindrops blown by the wind struck his body sideways, his clothes were rapidly soaked with rainwater. The rain also filled his shoes with water.

An umbrella under such situations would most likely be blown away immediately.

"Why don't you come along as well, Mariya. Though the weather is terrible, please endure."

Godou opened the door to the backseat and hastened Yuri to get off.

However, the Hime-Miko of Musashino appeared to have no intention of following. She only stared at Godou, pleading with sincere eyes.

"Kusanagi-san, you should have seen it right? Those [Wolves] and [Dead Servants] are only a part of the Marquis Voban's powers. You cannot defeat him. And if you went all out, it will definitely bring destruction to the surroundings."

And so, please hand me over. To this plea, Godou shook his head.

"I am not very smart, and cannot understand the reasons to do that. All I know is this: you are my friend who once helped me. If I abandoned such a girl, I will regret it—as I have said just now, this is my stubbornness."

Godou offered his hand to the persistent Hime-Miko.

Hoping that she would accept this hand. That was what Godou hoped for from the bottom of his heart.

"I don't want to hand you over to some old gramps like that. And I am not the only one who thinks that. Letting a courageous and compassionate girl suffer such cruelty from that stubborn old man, if anyone else heard about such an atrocity, I'm sure nine out of ten people will agree with my decision."

Godou felt that his oratory skills were very poor.

As he cursed his own uselessness at such a crucial time, Godou continued to speak.

"So, let's consider this... Of course I know that fighting against that old gramps will bring trouble to many people. But if things were properly explained, they should be able to endure for a while . I apologize for deciding without consultation, but it is something that cannot be helped."

Godou wondered if he could find the words to persuade Yuri who was the most serious person he knew.

Feeling that he had no other appeals to reason, Godou prayed as hard as he could while attempting to convey his wishes for her safety instead.

"I understand that you're worried about many things, but please just come with me. I beg you, Mariya."

"Your power, you do understand you cannot defeat the Marquis , right?"

"I have no intention of overextending myself for a win, but it is fine as long as losing is avoided. As long as I am able to protect Mariya I am satisfied. Even if my opponent is powerful, it is not farfetched to aim for a draw. Definitely, something can be done."

An optimistic speech devoid of worry, almost sounding like something Salvatore Doni would say.

Partially for the sake of giving Yuri confidence, Godou forced himself to speak in this manner.

It was a speech with stupid reasons and was completely lacking in credibility. Yuri finally sighed after listening.

"Really, enough... You give me no choice. You usually speak sensibly but why are you so sloppy now..."

Yuri looked up and gazed directly into Godou's eyes.

"No matter how righteous it is to oppose that kind of person, I still know you cannot succeed. So enough, your words of persuasion are like those of a fool."

Inconsistent with her sharp tone, she was not staring at Godou sternly.

Yuri timidly held out her hand.

The delicate hand slowly reached out towards Godou's outstretched hand.

"It is not like I believe in Kusanagi-san's words or anything like that. Don't misunderstand. It is not like I want you to risk your life or anything like that. After all, I am just a victim of your kidnapping. I suppose resistance is futile... In truth, this is all there is to it, so do not misunderstand."

"Yes, I understand. This is sufficient, Mariya."

Mariya took Godou's hand and gripped it tightly.

Like a lost child who finally found his father.

Godou nodded gladly. Yuri's face blushed and she lowered her head.

Yuri stood up and left the car, walking in the rain.

Her white Japanese attire was immediately drenched by the rain, and clung closely to the exceedingly feminine form of her body.

"I will face the Marquis together with Kusanagi-san—so, I am in your care."

"We will do our best."

Though it seemed like he had yet to fully gain the other's trust, Godou guaranteed with a smiling face.

Yuri also responded with a shy smile akin to falling cherry blossoms.

"Now that it's been decided, let's prepare the grounds... Mariya you should first cross through that door..."

As Godou pointed at the school entrance, Yuri sighed.

"I understand, it really is trespassing, how unlawful..."

"Umm, please don't scold me for now. Even I don't feel comfortable about this. Erica, please."

"Yeah yeah. Though you speak of reflection, but your true actions completely betray them—that is one of Godou's worst points. Well in this case, we have no other choice but to count on you."

Erica made an evil smile and also got off the car.

Bending forward, she grabbed one side of the skirt of her uniform.

And then she tore it and did the same for the other side, creating torn slits on both sides of the skirt. Of course, it was done to facilitate movement.

"The lion of steel, shield of the [Diavolo Rosso], may my spell words respond to my will!"

Disregarding the rain, Erica used the magic of summoning.

The magical sword of the lion, Cuore di Leone, appeared in her right hand.

Preparing her battle stance, Erica swung her beloved sword in a V-shape. The primary school's entrance was cut open by the slashing attack.

"Ah, this is something beyond my abilities to handle, so I will provide support from a distance. Sorry I can't be of much help. I wish you all luck in your struggle."

Amakasu said.

At this desperate time, he was still sitting casually at the driver's seat.

"Hmph. Unfamiliar with battle, really—but I don't think you are incompetent."

"Yes, Erica-san. If I had to fight you, I would lose utterly in thirty seconds."

"Is that so? From my estimates, you could last about three hundred seconds. Since it's rare to find an opportunity, would you like to try it now?"

To the smile appearing on Erica's face like a poisonous flower, Amakasu acted dumb and made a fawning smile.

After the parting pleasantries, the three of them slipped into the school under the cover of night.

It was after 8pm in the evening. Perhaps there might be staff on overtime. Godou prayed for them not to exit the building if that was the case.

Godou aimed for the playground which should prove to be advantageous.

To [Wolves] who possessed a keen sense of smell, hiding was probably useless so it would be better to choose a location with a clear view of the opponents.

They waited at the playground for about five minutes.

Finally, the pack of giant wolves appeared. Unexpected for their massive bodies, the wolves jumped over the school fence with ease and entered the playground.

The slowly approaching [Wolves] numbered roughly thirty or forty at least.

"I will take care of them. After all, you shouldn't use the [White Stallion] or the [Raptor] in such a place. Save the forms of Verethragna for the Marquis."

"Then I'll leave it to you."

Godou nodded generously to Erica's proposal.

Of the ten forms usurped from Verethragna, most of them gave no advantage in handling grouped enemies.

The [White Stallion] which summoned solar fire from the sky was one of the few exceptions, but it was too powerful to be used rashly.

On the other hand, the [Raptor] was comparatively more normal, but there were repercussions after its use.

"—Come, savior of the gentiles. Promised lord born from the virgin!"

Erica spoke softly to the silver sword and chanted the spell words.

Cuore di Leone floated into the air as if led by an invisible thread.

"By the holy name, O God of countless armies. God be praised! Hallowed be thy name!"

One sword, two swords, three swords. Cuore di Leone was multiplying into similarly shaped swords which appeared in the air in front of Erica.

In ten seconds, the magic silver sword had multiplied to thirteen.

"Then it is time to decide the victor, Cuore di Leone!"

This spell word became the trigger signal.

The thirteen swords became thirteen arrows and flew at the speed of lightning.

Aiming between the eyes of the incoming [Wolves], they stabbed forwards.

The gray wolves cried wretchedly.

Yet blood did not seep out from their wounds. Instead, a blue black liquid flowed from their foreheads. The giant wolves' corpses melted into the darkness and vanished.

Like those death knights, they appeared to be abnormal creatures.

Eliminating thirteen of the pack in one motion, Cuore di Leone flew and returned to Erica's hand.

At some unknown instant, it had returned to the one original sword.

"My hunting hounds seem to be ineffective against the [Diavolo Rosso], a pity."

A familiar voice echoed.

The embodiment of tyranny disguised by airs of intellectuality, the old Devil King spoke softly.

"Sorry to have kept you waiting, brats. Are you prepared to be beaten down by me?"

Thunder crashed. Violent winds screamed. Raindrops crashed repeatedly into the ground. Voban's voice carried over, completely unaffected by those noises.

Arrogant as ever, the Devil King casually strolled to the center of the playground.

Part 3

"I love stormy nights. Wind, rain and lightning, these all make me feel mighty. You are probably the same, brat. Even though you are immature, I am sure you and I are one of a kind."

Wearing a jet black coat over his suit, Voban spoke joyfully as the rain splattered against him.

Godou immediately frowned in anger.

In fact, from a very long time ago he did have a strange habit of having a good mood when there was a typhoon. Be that as it may, Godou did not feel like answering.

"So what? Are you just saying you like stormy nights?"

"No, I felt like it so I summoned it, and so it became like that. I believe it also suits your tastes. You don't mind, right?"

Dejanstahl Voban had the ability to call forth storms.

Simply witnessing a part of that power troubled Godou.

"Don't decide so casually, on what basis do you judge that?"

"After all, someone will not fight a deity unless they are disposed to going with the flow and rising to the occasion. People who become Campiones all have pretty much the same tendencies. "

Erica and Yuri listened on the side and simultaneously said "ah ah, I see" while showing an understanding expression. As both of them looked at him at the same time, Godou felt greatly uncomfortable for some reason.

"You really are a ridiculous old gramps. Then shall we start the first round?"

"If you fall now, there is no first or second. Struggle well and amuse me."

Voban waved his hand.

Immediately, ten [Wolves] appeared out of the darkness like foaming bubbles.

"Increasing the numbers so easily could get troublesome. But an opponent who relies on numbers is so unrefined. It's most displeasing."

"In terms of numbers, they have already won—stand back Mariya."

Godou spoke as he nodded to his companion's comments.

This was the beginning of a messy battle.

Erica threw Cuore di Leone into the air towards the distance.

"O Lion of steel, accept thy mission, transform into seven tachi[12], guard the imprisoned king, sing Blondel, and respond with the lion-hearted king."

The silver magic sword became seven fragments and scattered on the ground. And then, the fragments expanded and transformed into steel lions.

Seven lion sculptures were infused with life by magic.

Their fluid motions completely unrestrained by the normal properties of steel, the lions surrounded Godou and Yuri.

The steel lions blocked the approaching pack of [Wolves]. Erica created guards in response to Voban's ever increasing hunting hounds.

The wolves cried out!!

The [Wolf] pack all jumped.

In a rare moment, Erica was not using her usual Cuore di Leone but instead had summoned a very heavy looking sword. She faced the attack without any signs of fear.

Glamorously swinging her sword in a free flowing manner.

Erica repeatedly sliced through the onslaught of the wolf pack. Just as Voban said, hounds as big as horses were no match for her.

With one or two attacks from her sword, every wolf was either sliced into sections or pierced right through.

But even for Erica, the lone efforts of a single person had limits.

With absolute advantage in numbers, the [Wolves] only needed to keep up the attacks. Besides, the other wolves did not have an enemy as troublesome as Erica.

The [Wolves] targeting Yuri and Godou.

The lions born from Cuore di Leone faced off against those wolves.

Vanquishing the wolves with their bodies, fangs and claws of steel, the lions' battle power far exceeded the [Wolves].

Overwhelming victory.

However, the only problem was the numbers.

In order to handle the [Wolves] which got past their defense line, Godou had to activate Verethragna's authority at last.

Imagining the strength of the [Bull], Godou spoke the spell words.

"As the one who holds all victory in my hands, I am the strongest. Man and devil—all enemies, all who harbor enmity will be vanquished. Hence I shall smash through all enemies in my way!"

When fighting an inhumanly strong opponent, Verethragna's second form, the [Bull], granted overwhelming strength. Voban's summoned wolf pack completely satisfied this condition.

Speeding forward like an arrow, Godou aimed at an attacking wolf's snout and sent it flying with a powerful kick.

Godou avoided messy unarmed combat to prevent unnecessary injuries. If he got bitten, those jaws might crush his bones.

He sent them flying into the distance with as little contact as possible.

Godou's forward kick punted the [Wolves] high into the air like a football, all the things attacking himself and Yuri could be seen clearly.

However, the powers of the [Bull] form were definitely unsuitable for a disorganized fight against multiple opponents.

"These things just keep on coming, there really is no end in sight ...! Mariya, can I ask you something?"

Sending the sixth [Wolf] on a tour to the sky, Godou asked.

Though the guarding lions kept going without pause, the wolf pack also continued to increase. If this went on, they would run out of options soon.

"W-What is it, Kusanagi-san?"

"Last time, that move I used against Athena, do you think it would work against that old gramps?"

The old Devil King, who was continually summoning [Wolves] from a distance, simply watched the battle silently.

Godou tried to show a smile of confidence and preparedness.

From the start, the pace of battle had been fully controlled by Voban. Unless Godou found a way to regain initiative and counterattack there would be no chance of victory.

"...Probably not. I doubt those flames can defeat the Marquis. I cannot give a reason, but that is what I feel."

The miko, who possessed spirit vision, spoke with a very disquieted expression.

However, this opinion only made Godou more determined—if that was the case, why not try it?

"Got it. In that case, perhaps it's just as well."

"Eh? Kusanagi-san, what are you planning on doing?"

"Mariya, please do not leave my side for any reason."

Letting this continue would be meaningless, so Godou decided to bring about a conclusion to the battle.

"For victory, hasten forth before me! O immortal sun, please grant radiance to the stallion. O stallion that moves godlike with wondrous grace, bring forth the halo of thy master!"

The incantation to summon from the sky the white stallion which represented the sun, the third form of Verethragna.

Godou shouted sonorously.

Voban's face showed tension for the first time.

Finally sensing the coming of danger, he watched as the stormy night turned into a morning sky tinted by the color of dawn.

"The sun—the flames of heaven?"

Almost like the first light of dawn, the sun was rising out of the eastern sky.

—The power of judgement which could only be used against great sinners who brought great suffering to the populace. As expected of a three-hundred-year-old great Devil King, it looked like he had committed more than the minimum number of atrocities required to fulfill the conditions required.

White flames descended from the sky.

High temperature flames hot enough to vaporize steel with ease were approaching the ground.

At that instant, the [Wolves] that were causing so much trouble for Godou and Erica all vanished.

"Eh?"

Godou was struck by surprise.

Voban's figure transformed. From a human into an upright wolf with silver fur—a werewolf and it was completely the stance of a wolf.

Voban's body which had taken the form of a silver wolf, expanded in size instantly.

Roughly thirty meters in length, the massive body stopped expanding at an impossible size.

Oh oh oh oh oh oh oh oh oh oh!!

Massive roars reverberated in the stormy atmosphere.

The gigantic silver wolf leaped at the huge white flames which held the concentrated energy of the sun, bared its fangs and bit the flames with its massive jaws.

"...What the, that, there should be limits to such unreasonable power."

The unbelievable sight gave Godou a great shock.

Swallowed.

Just like that, the giant wolf completely swallowed the intense fires of the sun.

"To absorb... no, devour the flames of the [White Stallion], what kind of monster is this?"

Erica who had returned to Godou's side also exclaimed with surprise.

Having lost their opponents, the steel lions recombined to form Cuore di Leone once more, and returned to the form of her beloved sword.

"What... was that about?"

Yuri murmured with a shocked expression. Perhaps the sight before them was too hard to believe.

"Swallowing the fire that even Athena had difficulty resisting, should there not be a limit to such lack of reason!"

"To render useless the attack which defeated the deity of darkness as well as the earth, the goddess Athena of the highest level, what kind of god did that [Wolf] usurp his authority from!?"

Standing beside the speechless girl, Godou renewed his spirits. His goal of changing the flow of battle had been accomplished. That was enough.

'—Hahahahahahaha! Is this it? This is one of the abilities used to battle Salvatore, and defeated Athena! Very satisfying! This really makes me feel satisfied!'

—Oh oh oh oh oh oh oh oh!!

Massive roars of a wolf sounded simultaneously with Voban's voice. It was truly an incredible phenomenon.

'I feel I must properly reward such a rare banquet. If I don't do this carefully, I might crush you along with the miko—come, listen to my bidding, my servants!'

Entities possessing dark demonic characteristics flowed out once again.

This time, they were not [Wolves] but death knights previously met in the library—dead people were appearing out of the darkness carrying the same aura.

In their hands were swords, spears, axes and other classical weapons.

Many of them were wearing armor decorated with engraved crests from knight organizations.

There were about forty of them. From their anachronistic attire, they seemed to be summoned from five or six centuries ago.

'My followers who have already died, you were all carefully selected warriors. Now, go hunt like dogs!'

Oh oh oh oh oh oh oh!!

The Devil King's laughter sounded at the same time as the fierce roars.

In addition, the death knight army began to step forward, wielding their weapons, and attacked with determination.

The word 'slow' would be the wrong description for these zombies.

Bearing dead faces and engaging in close quarter combat, they displayed great intelligence and strength, just like a fierce and experienced army of knights.

"Godou, be careful everyone. I fear that they may very well be Great Knights when alive—warriors of the same rank as me. To be honest, I have no confidence in protecting you all this time."

Erica's gaze which had switched to the death knights, was completely different from when she was facing fodder.

There was not a hint of playful attitude, and she was rather alert .

"The girl at the library—was she your friend, Erica? How did she describe it, what were those colleagues of hers really? Aren't they just zombies??"

"Kusanagi-san, becoming a [Dead Servant] is the tragic fate suffered by those who were killed by the Marquis' hand."

The one who answered Godou's question was Yuri.

"The ability to make loyal obedient servants out of those that died directly by his hand. This was the authority that the Marquis usurped from the Egyptian god Osiris. Those people seem to fully recall their skills from when they were alive, and will be tougher enemies than the wolves."

"We may very well turn out like them in the end, so watch out!"

At the unimaginably tragic fate of these death knights, Godou frowned.

"To have performed so many acts of evil, that damn old man really pisses me off."

Godou looked up to the stern face of the old Devil King who had taken the form of a giant wolf.

After turning into that form, strong wind and rain from the storm was nothing to him. Completely arrogant, it was also a very detestable form.

—And then, the death knights swarmed in.

Erica swung her sword and engaged one of them. One, two, three, four. Their strikes clashed intensely. Even a layman could tell that those skills displayed were extremely powerful.

Of course, the death knights also approached Godou and Yuri.

(Are we going to lose now?)

Godou silently talked to himself. He was too naive. He did not prepare enough to fight such a difficult enemy as the Marquis Voban.

If one did not acquire knowledge of the opponent's abilities, personality and goals, defeat was certain.

This was the inevitable outcome. Since his loss was due to his insufficient power and his taking things too lightly, there was no room for regret. Be that as it may—

"Kusanagi-san..."

"Don't worry, Mariya, just watch as I penetrate the barricade for you. Follow me closely."

Godou will definitely protect the trembling girl behind his back.

That was his responsibility. Determined, Godou took a deep breath.

—He exchanged a quick glance with Erica as she brandished her sword nearby. They immediately understood each other.

In the instant it took for their gazes to meet, several death knights had rushed over.

The massive axe was lifted high before Godou's eyes. This wasn't fast enough. Speed up!

Godou took another deep breath.

Standing behind him, Yuri asked worriedly: "Kusanagi-san, you seem to be a little strange, what is going on?" Her voice felt very distant, no, it wasn't distant, but slowed down, it was due to my senses becoming extraordinary. Faster, ever faster, imagining in my mind, birds that fly higher than anyone else, the form of the bird of prey that flew higher, faster, further than all others.

As Godou stood motionless, the battle axe was fiercely swung down upon his head.

Yuri cried out plaintively.

There were many bothersome aspects to the [Raptor] incarnation, but this was the worst moment in particular.

Unless attacked by a quick strike exceeding normal parameters, this form could not be used. Examples included bullets, ambushed by crazed wild beasts, or an attack from an accomplished martial artist.

At these thoughts crossed his mind, Godou whispered.

"Fear of the winged, both the evil and the powerful, all shall fear I who hold these feathered wings. My wings will bring you curse and just deserts!"

Acceleration, and slowing down.

Accelerating Godou's own body, while slowing down everything else.

About to have his head split in half, Godou casually dodged the battle axe with millimeters to spare.

Too slow.

The death knights who Erica had regarded as equal to her.

To Godou now, they were far too slow. Sword, axe, spear, sword, sword—five weapons were attacking Godou simultaneously.

These were also too slow. All could be seen clearly, and all were evaded.

Finally, one of the death knights was sent flying. An amateurish counterattack spectacularly knocked the knight onto the ground. Probably, the knight failed to evade due to Godou's exceptional speed.

Godou grabbed Yuri's hand.

Without saying a word, he carried Yuri in his arms. "Ah!? Ku-kusanagi-san—!?" What she said wasn't very clear, I'll ask her some other time.

Godou pushed hard against the ground and leaped with Yuri in his arms.

The trajectory of the jump followed a massive curve.

Easily jumping over ten meters, Godou easily cleared the death knights who surrounded him.

—Super acceleration, as well as the body becoming extremely light.

That was the power of Verethragna's [Raptor] form. As long as it was something that could be held in two hands, it was very convenient to use this ability to carry things.

Since its speed was something that Godou could not fully control, it was impossible to move with precision.

If one wanted to move just twenty centimeters, he would often go one meter or beyond. But other than that, it was a horrifyingly effective ability.

On the flip side, it also carried a great price.

Enduring the pain reaching towards his heart, Godou leaped once more.

In an instant, he had reached the edge of the playground. He looked back at the battlefield he had left behind in the distance.

Even from there he could clearly see the monstrously tall and well-built body of Voban. Not only could he summon wolves, but what kind of monster could also transform itself into a wolf?

Roughly two thirds of the death knights were rushing to pursue the escaped him.

Erica was alone, moving in the opposite direction.

Fighting by herself, she swung Cuore di Leone and began to flee.

Godou wanted to help, but if he went over with Yuri, they would only become burdens. By herself, Erica could probably bring out her power better without restraint.

It was probably better to lure even more death knights over to this direction.

...The exchange of glances prior to using the [Raptor] communicated each other's plans. The battle here was sure to have ended in defeat, so in that case, they had to retreat from this location with all their strength.

Godou prayed for his companion's safety as he jumped once again.

Easily clearing the wall around the school, Godou paid attention to his pursuers as he decided to speed up and shake them off his trail.

Of course, Voban will be using those [Wolves] again.

Nevertheless, escaping from this place will prevent the worst outcome.

"Ah...! Truly exhausting, this..."

His chest pain gradually intensified.

In the arms of the frowning Godou, Yuri's face was full of concern.

"Are you okay? Kusanagi-san? Your face looks like you are suffering..."

"Ah, it's nothing. No, if this continues I won't be able to lose those guys. We have no choice but to find a place to hide—"

In the stormy night, visibility was poor, and his body was getting cold.

Godou and Yuri in her miko outfit continued their escape.

Chapter 6 - You, Born from Light Amidst Darkness

Part 1

Erica Blandelli recalled from her experience the existence of [Leap] magic.

It was a kind of magic that lightened one's body and allowed one's jumping ability to exceed human limits. Using this would allow her to perform amazing moves that her beloved Hong Kong movies produced only through the use of harnesses.

Even without a running start she could jump to places taller than her own height.

She could even run up vertical walls or perform agile acrobatics that even the top stunt actors could never hope to imitate.

—Now she was skillfully using this magic to escape.

In a city center in the middle of a stormy night without any shelter.

Flying between the rows of towering buildings from roof top to roof top, Erica was scurrying around so much that even something like a cat or a monkey would have no way of keeping up.

Erica prided herself on this magic. If she used it seriously, there was virtually no one who surpassed her skill.

However, amongst the death knights there were three who also excelled in this type of magic. Likewise using [Leap] magic, but pursuing like the shadow of death personified.

"Truly difficult to handle—"

Erica muttered.

The strong winds shook her body, and the rain made visibility very poor. Furthermore, it was night time. Since it was wet everywhere, a careless misstep could easily lead to a fall.

Erica continued to scurry around unfazed by these disadvantageous conditions.

However, it was probably enough. Shaking them off her trail would be impossible so it might not be a bad idea to turn around and counterattack here.

There were three of these knights in pursuit.

Other than the numerical disadvantage, it would also be rather difficult to dispatch one of them with the first strike.

While using [Transformation] magic on the magical sword in her right hand, she looked back to observe. Cuore di Leone changed its form from a slender sword into a throwing spear.

A short but heavy spear meant for throwing.

Twisting, she threw at an acute angle. At the instant the throwing spear left the hand of Erica, two identical clones also appeared like shadows.

A total of three throwing spears flew straight into the directions of the three death knights.

The spear tips crisply penetrated their chests, piercing the heart protected beneath the chain mail.

The surviving dead souls collapsed into dust.

It was likely that the decision-making capability of the death knights—the ability to think, was lower than when they were alive . It took them longer to change their actions.

Which is why Erica acted as she did. Running away continually for long distances followed by a rapid counterattack, the plan came into fruition perfectly.

—However, the last performance has yet to begin.

As Cuore di Leone returned from its spear form back to the sword, Erica made preparations for the remaining enemies.

Now was the key moment. Swordplay, magic, strategy, wisdom . Opponents who matched her in every one of these categories were arriving soon.

"Running all the way over here, it does not really match your preference for spectacular battle."

The voice appeared out of the rainy night.

An elegant and cute voice of a girl, but hiding great strength beneath gentle softness.

"Like a rat scurrying around, this ends now. Erica Blandelli."

"Come to think of it, you once said you wanted to fly like a swallow. Lily, that's no good, you're really lacking in poetic expression."

Liliana Kranjcar.

Amidst the strong winds, Erica was mocking the completely drenched girl who was beautiful as a fairy and wearing a blue and black cape. For her to appear here was nothing extraordinary.

This girl was the descendant of a true and proper witch. Completely surpassing Erica, she was a master of flying magic.

"Do not call me Lily!—If you were not working as the subordinate of that weak king, then there would not be a need to emulate it. Furthermore, there would not be a need to be like a female fox. How inconsiderate!"

"Rather than some sort of scheming, this is just my love. This isn't like you, to lack feeling in your words."

As the two female knights talked under the intense rain and wind, they walked towards each other.

They understood each other's capabilities very well. Whether the winner or the loser, neither would be able to conclude the battle unharmed.

"My wings, shape steel into the blade of illusion—Il Maestro, lend me your power!"

Liliana raised her arm towards the sky, and loudly summoned her beloved sword.

The silver long-bodied sabre appeared and Liliana jumped up from the ground at that instant.

Approaching like a flash of lightning.

With comparable speed, Erica dodged to the side. Rather than swordsmanship, it was more like a dance—taking leaping steps like those of the flamenco[13], while dodging the attacks from the approaching enemy.

Liliana, who had caught up with Erica's speed, moved quietly with gliding steps.

Running as if she were ice-skating, she pursued Erica's light footsteps.

"Do not think that you can escape from me with that kind of speed!"

"True. In that case, let me defeat you with power!"

Erica performed a forward thrust with Cuore di Leone, aiming for Liliana's heart.

It was not a single attack. Within the time of a single breath, Erica struck out thrice, a killing move consisting of three sudden thrusts.

Il Maestro gave off melodic metallic tones like an instrument, and at the same time parried Erica's attack rhythmically.

Liliana's swordsmanship was both extremely beautiful and wonderfully precise.

Skillfully wielding the heavy weapon, while simultaneously making forceful attacks, Erica moved the exquisite magical sword to lightly evade or parry attacks.

Erica did not attack with abandon, but was biding her time.

Not her sword, but with her foot. Aiming at Liliana's instep, Erica mercilessly stepped towards her opponent's foot as if crushing it with her heel.

"Wait, you are using your feet so vilely just like in the past!"

"Lily, look at you. You still haven't changed your habit of cursing when you get excited. A knight should always aim for more spectacular battles!"

Towards Liliana who retreated to dodge her opponent's heel, Erica smiled gracefully.

As they continued to slice and attack each other, the distance between them gradually shrank. In that case, a situation of close combat would develop, and using the feet was a normal part of swordsmanship.

Maintaining her position, Erica chopped downwards directly.

The magical sword of the lion was blocked by Il Maestro. Closing in on the guard of the sword. Immediately Erica stepped forward on impact, using the magic sword to blow away the light Liliana.

"This monstrously strong girl! What spectacular battle? It is just like a horse pulling a cart with brute strength!"

"If that's the case, wouldn't it be better to describe it as strong and majestic like a lion?"

To her cursing opponent, Erica rebutted with a smile.

Liliana snorted and took a large step. This was in preparation for her prided flying skill. To fly freely in the sky like a bird, she needed the proper distance.

"If that is the case, then I shall soar high like a falcon. Be prepared... Hmph, they already caught up?"

Inadvertently, Liliana was lightly surprised.

Erica easily guessed the reason. With the clattering of chain mail and other metallic weapons, clearly a few other knights had arrived using [Leap].

The death knights in pursuit of Erica with orders from Voban.

There were four of them.

—They each took a position and surrounded the array of buildings the two girls were fighting on.

Scattered amongst the roof tops of the surrounding homes and buildings, they formed a net of encirclement.

"...Looks like they will be disturbing us no matter what. Then I shall step back. If you can cut your way out of this, let us determine the victor another day."

Liliana spoke as she put down Il Maestro.

Losing all interest because the duel was interrupted. Rather than fighting for the sake of killing or pitting wits and power against each other, knights fought to showcase their skill and bravery.

Truly my great rival. One who could distinguish battles from duels properly.

...However.

At this point, Erica thought of a way to get out of this situation.

Not by a surprise attack, but fighting all four of these death knights face to face would be too difficult. However, it would be totally different if she had a partner who was at least equal to her. Fortunately, such a trump card was right here.

"Hey Lily, I happen to have something to tell you..."

With a gentle and lovely voice she seldom used, Erica spoke.

"No way. I hate talking to you and it never ends well. Is it not better for me to watch the current dangerous situation instead?"

Liliana's response was rather cold.

However, Erica expected it and showed an openly accepting smile like that of a noblewoman.

"Don't speak so coldly oh. This may prove to be to your benefit—Lily, are you actually thinking of serving Marquis Voban and following his every order from now?"

"Why not? I am only fulfilling my duties to the [King]."

Without hesitation, a proper answer.

However, this was precisely why it was so fun to play around with Liliana Kranjcar.

Feeling the movements of the death knights, Erica added emphasis to her tone. If they were biding their time before rushing in, then now was the time to bring Liliana to her side!

"So... If that's the case, why don't you fulfill your duties to another king? If that is the only reason why you follow the Marquis, then there's no problem, right?"

"...Are you suggesting I change my allegiance to Kusanagi Godou?"

Seeing Liliana's eye brows twitch, Erica spoke like an older sister or any type of elder.

"Correct. If it's him then you will definitely get the thrill of battle—Lily, did you really follow the Marquis to Tokyo without reservations? I understand you very well, Lily, which is why I have my doubts. It is completely unlike you to be yielding to the Marquis' tyranny so obediently."

"This and that. It is all your fault, Erica Blandelli!"

Without a clue to the reason of her anger, Erica felt mildly surprised.

"Uh, is that so? Why?"

"It is entirely the fault of your scheming against Kusanagi Godou and accepting the role of his lover! This is what provoked my grandfather's oppositional defiance!"

Feeling there was a hidden story behind this explanation, Erica made a mental note.

The grandfather living in seclusion was well known amongst worshipers of Dejanstahl Voban.

Learning that the young mistress of the rival Blandelli family had become the lover of the newly born Campione, he must have felt his days gone to waste. And so he must have arranged to let the long time acquainted old king summon his granddaughter to cater to his whims.

"Could it really be true, Lily, that the grandfather sent you to the Marquis so that his own granddaughter could become the lover of a [King] as well? ...Isn't this a totally mistaken casting decision?"

From this honest girl, expecting seduction was too much.

Erica felt sympathy for the furious Liliana.

"Really. What does he think his granddaughter is..."

"If that's the case, then why not end it? Lily, you are suppressing your own will to cater to the Marquis' excesses. Isn't it time for you to be yourself, Liliana Kranjcar? One is a tyrant who would force a girl to carry out his unreasonable requests, while the other is the young king fighting to aid this helpless girl—Who do you think is the correct side?"

The death knights were about to attack. Godou and Yuri's fates were still unknown.

Too many things to be confirmed, and too many problems requiring solutions. However, one must not give in to anxiety so Erica presented an air of casual generosity and continued.

"If you have never sworn allegiance to the Marquis verbally, then which king you choose is your decision... If the anachronistic old man has any objections, then Salvatore Doni will answer as our true chief of Milan. Since Kusanagi Godou is his ally and is currently fighting for the weak—I think you'll soon lose your reasons for serving the Marquis, Lily."

"Hmph. An attractive proposal, but are you toying with me once again?"

Liliana suspiciously eyed her surroundings.

Erica did the same. Surveying the area as she conversed elegantly, she had never let down her guard for a moment. She was ready to battle any time.

"Ara, have I ever played a joke on you, Lily?"

"Do not pretend you are ignorant. Two years ago, when we were itching to go to the movies, were you not laughing your head off when you successfully tricked me into watching that romantic film with the intense bed scenes!?"

"I didn't know it was that kind of movie either. And really, Lily, you even fainted to have a wonderful dream in the middle of watching it."

"No, not at all. I also fell for your tricks when we were selecting clothes while shopping in Milan. All you picked were those shameless clothing with low cuts, open backs and bared navels, and you bought so much—!"

"Lily you have a great figure, so those clothes really suit you. You should be more confident in yourself!"

"Q-Quiet! Also, half a year ago when we met in Venice by chance—you k-kept saying all these nice but insincere things to please me, and played me like a toy!"

"Oh my, are you saying this is the same? And here I was, trying to give Lily some good advice!"

At that instant, the death knights finally made a move.

Taking advantage of the moment when Liliana let her guard down and lost awareness of their presence, two of the four knights swung their blades at Erica, chopping downwards!

Not only was there a disadvantage in numbers, but one could not stop moving when fighting in a place like this.

Stopping would immediately mean being surrounded, and a one against many fight will result in a massacre. However Erica forced herself to move and face the two attacking death knights.

Swinging Cuore di Leone to restrict the chopping motion of one of them, she followed the motion of the sword with her hips.

As the sword of the second knight approached, she dodged glamorously with a slight twist of her body.

In that instant, she looked at Liliana.

Their glances exchanged. The face, beautiful as a doll's, frowned slightly. Il Maestro went into motion once more. As the blue and black cape fluttered in the wind, Liliana Kranjcar finally took action.

"You will receive your comeuppance one day! Be prepared!"

As she made her short complaint, Liliana approached.

Erica was using herself as bait for the two death knights, while Liliana made a series of fierce attacks using Il Maestro.

One flash, two flashes.

Just like that, Liliana subdued the two unwary knights.

There were two knights remaining which could be dealt with one on one. The two of them also jumped onto the roof where Erica and Liliana were.

The first to make a move was Liliana.

Like a bird she jumped high into the stormy sky. The blue and black cape fluttered in the wind following her as she swooped down like a fierce bird of prey.

Below her one of the death knights waited.

The corpse held a longsword and thrusted towards the girl who had nowhere to hide in midair.

—Too naive.

Having said that, Erica's lips curled with a smile of assurance.

The type of [Leap] that Liliana used was much different from Erica's. It went much faster, flew much higher, jumped much further, and could even ignore principles of continuity.

Her descent suddenly halted.

Liliana stopping her free fall was like hitting the brakes in mid air. The sword of the death knight missed its target.

Immediately, Liliana resumed her fall and swung her sabre downwards.

The weight and the force of the leap powered the sword's attack with kinetic energy as it struck the death knight, and a deep slash crossing from the right shoulder to the left hip sliced open the body.

Falling to the ground, the knees collapsed and the body fell forward and began to crumble from the bottom.

In a short moment, the death knight turned into scattered dust.

Liliana Kranjcar's leaping skills had already reached the level of flying. Even a master would have difficulty winning against her if they were unfamiliar with the way she fought.

"Truly amazing, Lily. You've always had a talent for flying around!"

Erica expressed approval.

Since ancient times, this had been deeply rooted in the witch culture of eastern and southern Europe.

It was said that they made secret potions, tamed wild beasts in the woods with magic, and flew freely in the skies. Being able to acquire these skills was determined by disposition at birth, as well as further training throughout life.

Erica's aptitude in this area was greatly surpassed by Liliana.

However, to make up for it—

Manipulating steel, and using spells to forge blades and spears. In terms of the power to use magic to create these tools of killing and destruction, Erica was far ahead!

"Cuore di Leone which was forged by the black night! The descendant of the highest sword! Respond to my prayer, the steel of kings!"

This was the arcane art of the Excalibur[14], to raise her beloved sword's slicing efficiency to the max.

Using these spell words, Erica struck with her sword in a superior posture. The longsword used by the death knight was cleanly cut in half by Cuore di Leone.

Against the attacks of the blue and red knights, the last death knight also turned into dust.

"Even from a long time ago, you have been using brute strength to defeat others like this. What an idiot suited for charging on the front lines."

"Hey Lily. I've always been praising you directly, why are you always insulting me... This is why I say you are not lady-like."

The displeased Liliana immediately worsened her expression at Erica's criticism.

"Quiet! Rather than this, you should be rushing to meet up with your master. That important person should probably still be fighting for Mariya Yuri, right? Head there before it is too late!"

The noble, unsullied and chivalrous knight. This was the maiden called Liliana Kranjcar.

Witnessing this truth once again, Erica smiled.

She did not want to work under the Marquis. On a certain level, she definitely supported Kusanagi Godou.

"Very true... But this is great, Lily volunteering to help me. However, my interest is in threatening!"

"Threatening? Do you really think you can threaten me with a sword to force me to join?"

Liliana spoke like she was treated as a fool to be played with.

However, Erica grinned and shook her head. She was not going to engage in that kind of tasteless behavior.

"Hey, in a certain drawer in your bedroom—the second one counting from the top. That notebook there, isn't it quite nice? Very expressive and full of feeling, like a young girl's!"

"—!?"

Liliana stared at Erica with murderous eyes.

Erica continued unfazed.

"Who would have thought you had an interest in writing novels ? 'I hate those kinds of aloof people. However, what is this intense beating in my chest? Is it possible, could this be, is this love?' Romance novels with this kind of feeling are so rare in the current entertainment media. If it were me, I would put in more dead people, murders, action, and martial arts!"

"What! Hey hey hey! How do you know the existence of 'that'!?"

Erica hummed slightly and smiled.

There was actually a maid in the Kranjcar household who acted as a secret informant, but there was no need to reveal that fact.

"Fufufu. If Lily would become my close friend from now on, then I will automatically forget about the existence of that notebook? So, comprehend?"

"Kill! I would rather kill you to silence that mouth of yours forever!"

To the seriously furious Liliana, Erica gave out a glamorous smile.

This was the smile that Godou described as like a devil's.

"Don't be so hasty. If I died, the sealed contents of the will is full of details of that novel—I was thinking it might come in handy one day, but I never expected it to be today!"

"You, you, you devil! You are not human!!"

Hearing repeated cries of that most familiar title, Erica began planning the next step.

Since a powerful ally has been gained, it was time to meet up with Godou as soon as possible. The king who lent his assistance to those in need, where was he now—?

Part 2

It was just as Erica Blandelli was bringing Liliana Kranjcar over to her cause.

Kusanagi Godou and Mariya Yuri were at the door of a public recreation facility.

It was slightly after half past nine at night.

All staff and users had already left earlier. Presumably because of the sudden storm which resembled a typhoon, they all left hastily.

—Keeping Yuri in his arms, Godou ran here as if he was flying.

Knowing his limit was near, he happened upon this shelter, and fell over like an invalid as he stepped in.

"Kusanagi-san!? What is the matter!"

"...I'm sorry, Mariya. Let me stay like this for a while. This always happens after using the [Raptor]. Due to using it for so long, this part becomes very painful..."

Whispering, Godou pressed upon his chest with his hand.

Verethragna's [Raptor] could grant Godou superhuman speed and a light body. The cost for doing so was the current condition. An intense pain in the heart depending on the length of usage.

No magic existed to alleviate this pain. As Godou was covered with cold sweat, there was nothing he could do but endure.

"Please relax your body. I will now use magic to relieve pain."

"No, it won't work... But I'll be fine."

Godou refused the rare show of concern.

However, Yuri did not heed him, and started treatment on her own. Placing her palm on Godou's chest, she gently caressed him.

Through her palm a gentle warmth was transmitted. In normal situations it would probably soothe the most intense pains. Regrettably, a Campione's body was not a normal body.

Whether hostile or friendly, all directly applied magic will be rejected.

This was due to their powerful resistance towards magic and wizardry.

"...No effect? How could this be!?"

Yuri was surprised to discover the lack of effect from her magic.

Godou endured the pain and smiled slightly. In fact he was already in too much pain to do that, but forced himself to make display for her.

"Think back, didn't I tell you before? Under normal circumstances, our bodies are resistant to the effects of magic.

However, the only exception is when magic is blown directly into the body..."

"That, that really was true!"

It was the battle against Athena last time. That time when Godou accepted Erica's [Teaching] magic from her mouth directly, and obtained knowledge about the goddess. Yuri had felt extreme indignation watching that scene.

"I-I thought that when y-you and Erica-san did that... That shameless intimate contact, it was just an excuse... S-so sorry!"

"Could it be that you always thought that... —Ouch it really hurts!!"

The painful sensation attacking his heart was like being pricked with needles.

As Yuri worriedly watched Godou's face, she kept caressing the area around Godou's chest.

"You don't need to do that, Mariya. After all it doesn't work."

"No. Even without magic, there will still be an effect. Do not speak like you know everything. To have used such a dangerous power... you really go out of control sometimes."

Despite saying that, the motions of Yuri's hand were extremely gentle.

Pain was really subsiding. The warmth from the palm of her hand was very comfortable.

"In the past, my mother would always do this where I was hurt. Even though she was a normal person who did not know any spells, the pain always receded gradually. So I know that it will work for Kusanagi-san."

"Ah ah, yes. Perhaps it really is like that..."

But of course, the pain in his heart was still there.

However, compared to enduring the pain just now, he found it easier to endure. Godou finally relaxed his body a little... and then, noticed.

Without noticing when, he had started engaging in intimate contact with Yuri.

The two of them had their clothes drenched by rain—Godou was wearing his school uniform, while Yuri was wearing the miko outfit. Having absorbed massive amounts of water, the fabric clung closely to the skin, and mercilessly absorbed body warmth.

However, the parts in bodily contact felt warm instead.

Unlike Erica, Yuri did not use perfume or anything like that. But leaning so closely together, a sweet fragrance could be picked up.

This was bad. Godou felt embarrassed from the bottom of his heart.

"Umm, umm Mariya, could you stay back a little? I think I'm much better now."

"N-no Kusanagi-san. If there is still an effect, then it would be better to maintain this. Also, if we do this our bodies can feel warmth... Umm, the two of us can..."

Yuri also seemed to have noticed the same thing, and they avoided each other's gaze.

The part which the miko's white outfit did not cover—the face turned bright red as autumn leaves. Was it imagination? But body warmth also felt like it was rising.

—Ten minutes later.

Most of the pain had gone away. However, it was still difficult to move the limbs.

After experiencing a certain period of intense pain, the body became powerless and could not move temporarily. This was the price of using the [Raptor] form.

However, since one obtained unparalleled speed in return, perhaps it couldn't be helped.

Maybe due to the lack of conversation, Godou tried his hardest to think of other things.

In the tens of minutes leaning close together without a word being said, it was like being tortured or interrogated. At least, if there was something to chat about...

"A-anyway, about that old gramps. Mariya once mentioned it, right? The usurped authority which allowed the manipulation of corpses. That one, what was the god called?"

"...Osiris. The ancient Egyptian deity of agricultural fertility, and the god ruling the underworld."

"...A god of harvest as well as the underworld? Why do I feel like I've heard of this guy before?"

The goddess Athena was the dark deity of the underworld as well as the great mother earth goddess.

Then wasn't it exactly the same as the battle that ended a month ago? Godou felt doubtful.

"Perhaps it is just as Kusanagi-san thought. A fertility deity, who can turn the earth into swaths of lush greenery, turns into a god of the underworld when winter or night time arrives. Like Athena, there are two sides to Osiris. However, he was a male god and not a mother earth goddess."

The mother goddess in Egypt was named Isis. The goddess of the earth who was also the wife of Osiris.

Killed by one of the younger brothers of a desert god, Osiris' corpse was torn to pieces and thrown into the Nile. The one who gathered the pieces together was his wife Isis.

The pieces of the body were sewn back together by the god Anubis, and revived.

Thus resurrected, Osiris became the king of the underworld, judging the dead based on sins committed during their lifetime—

"And that is to say, the Egyptian version of Yamaraja[15]? Which is why Voban can make the people he killed crawl out from their graves to become zombies or mummies and bind them to the living world."

"T-that description is a bit crude, but categorizing it that way should be correct."

After listening to the myths told by Yuri, Godou looked at his right hand.

...Still no good.

The god-killing golden sword. It was still uncertain whether the [Warrior] form's power could be used.

"Can you tell me more about Osiris? I want to gather more intelligence as preparation for the [Warrior]."

"I am really sorry. I do not know any more details... However, Marquis Voban is not a god, right? So I do not think that the power to seal a god can be used?"

Yuri wondered, surprised.

Godou had originally thought the same, but shook his head.

"The [Warrior]'s [Sword] can destroy a Campione's authority. If Osiris' authority is sealed, then Voban will not be able to manipulate the dead as his puppets. That guy will also weaken, and those people can return to their graves... Ah, but perhaps the harder one to handle is the [Wolf]? If he took on that monstrous form, I am out of options."

In the duel against Salvatore Doni, Godou had found out by accident.

However, thinking of the previous battle, Godou felt depressed.

The form capable of dueling Voban's giant wolf avatar would be the [Boar]. However, if those kinds of monsters were to battle in the middle of the city, who knew how many innocent victims there would be?

"What kind of god was the [Wolf] authority usurped from? The first god that the old gramps defeated... Even Mariya doesn't know , right?"

"Yes, I am sorry I cannot be of any help. Even I was surprised by that [Wolf]—"

Suddenly, Yuri stopped talking.

Staring into empty space, murmuring in a soft voice.

"As the sun possessing the strongest light... The beast which swallowed and assimilated it... Definitely cannot have attributes of darkness... If that was the case, the existence of the god that brings eternal night will..."

"Mariya what is going on with you?"

Seeing her acting a bit strange, Godou yelled out.

However, Yuri still did not respond. If his hand could move, Godou would definitely shake her by the shoulder.

"The god that can devour light, that definitely implies the presence of the same light within him... However, this is not enough... The wolf is a symbol of the earth and greenery... Not only the god of the earth but light as well—Kusanagi-san!"

Yuri's eyes regained feeling.

Grabbing Godou's immobile body, Yuri said.

"Got it! I got it! The first god Voban fought—the identity of the god from which the authority of wolves was usurped from, I saw it!"

Mariya possessed top notch power in spirit vision.

Godou thought of this fact. Very likely, in witnessing Voban's use of the authority, the secret was leaked out.

"How amazing, Mariya. So which god is it after all? Name? Do you know his myth?"

"Like the god Osiris, he is also a god of the earth and greenery. No, rather than the earth, it is more accurate to say he is a god of birth. Darkness and the earth are synonyms. The world dominated by darkness—which is to say the underground is an existence combining darkness with the earth together. However, he is made of the light born from darkness and the earth!"

"He? So what is his name? Is it a god I should already know?"

"His oldest name was called light. The god of rats and wolves. The deity of gold and silver!"

At this point, Yuri's shoulders slumped over.

As if she discovered her words were too fragmented.

"I am really sorry, even though it is completely clear in my mind, I cannot express it in words easy to understand. Same for the name, it was originally at the tip of my tongue..."

In other words, what she sensed could not be visualized easily into understandable language.

Looking at Yuri who bowed her head, Godou understood.

Just like a mathematical prodigy who cannot explain how a formula can be solved by instincts, Yuri who understood a god's true nature by direct sight could not relay the information to mortals by words.

What should be done? She finally found a way to help, but it became meaningless.

"I-I am sorry, Kusanagi-san. Even though you have done so much for me, I cannot help at all... Even though I have this power, but it has not been helpful at such a critical moment..."

Yuri looked like she was about to cry, and lowered her head.

She must be feeling deeply ashamed of the current situation.

This situation is actually not something she should be so concerned about. If his body could move freely, Godou really wanted to pat her shoulder and caress her head to comfort her.

At least say something. Godou did not show any signs of despair, and said clearly.

"Don't think too much of it. When my body recovers, let's go find Erica. If it's her, then the current hints should be enough to figure out which god it is. So, don't lose hope."

"Ok... As a mage, Erica-san should be beyond first rate—wait a minute, magic?"

Yuri nodded as she renewed her spirit.

And then she felt confused.

"So as mentioned, Kusanagi-san and Erica-san were using that... u-using mouths, umm, to transmit knowledge, right? Up to now, you have done it many many times, right?"

"Eh, ummm, uh, at times of great need, yes, a few times..."

What is going on, what is this sense of danger?

Godou somehow felt an omen of great danger, and subconsciously tried to retreat.

However, his body could not move. He still could not muster any strength—if this continued it might be very dangerous.

"Why do you not do the same this time?"

Yuri's cold expression probably wasn't due to the rain, right?

Like the face of a yasha[16], no doubt about it, a refreshingly cool but cheerless smile had appeared.

"No, no way. Please don't! I definitely don't want to do that!"

"Are you lying? If you do lie, I will despise you."

"Please don't despise me! I am not lying! I swear to god it's the truth!"

"...Is that so? Normally I would automatically assume Kusanagi-san was a hopeless person who could lie with a straight face, but today I will believe your words."

"Ah, ah ah. Thanks..."

Yuri's beautiful face returned to its usual gentleness.

Seeing that, Godou felt relief from the bottom of his heart—for some reason, he felt like he was saved!

Crash!

At that moment, the sound of thunder rumbled noisily.

Crash! Crash!

The thunder continued. It felt like it was near, and the sound was very loud.

The winds were also blowing stronger and stronger.

The trees planted in front of the public recreation facility were shaking violently from the wind, and the windows of the building rattled constantly.

Up to now, the roof above Godou and Yuri had not let in any wind or rain. However, raindrops were suddenly blown in by the strong winds.

There was a rubbish-like object twisting in the sky.

Godou and Yuri gave out a cry of surprise. Riding upon the storm in the air of the night was the flying roof of some temporary shack from somewhere.

Looking carefully, there were also objects like signs and pieces of wood being blown about by the powerful winds.

"Ah, the wind has gotten stronger?"

"It's probably summoned by that old Voban. That old gramps, does he want Tokyo to be buried by an out of season typhoon?"

Unlike before, all the rivers now had well-designed anti-flooding engineering.

There was virtually no chance of flooding from the Tokyo rivers of the Arakawa, the Edogawa, and the Nakagawa. Still, in a storm like this, it doesn't make it any less dangerous.

It was very easy to imagine that many victims will appear, and there will be a huge disaster.

"We must meet with Erica as quickly as possible. It will be problematic if we don't stop that old gramps soon."

"However, where is she now? Hopefully she is safe..."

Yuri spoke softly, worried.

This was also what Godou was worrying about, but he could not bring himself to say anything comforting.

—Can this go on any longer? Anxiety was slowly eroding their hearts, and the two of them began a long stretch of silence.

After about five minutes, Yuri suddenly spoke.

"Kusanagi-san... I have something I must tell you."

"W-What?"

Yuri had a determined expression—it looked extremely cute.

Blushing from embarrassment, it was the cutest expression she had ever shown. Godou felt the loud sound of his own heartbeat.

"Actually, I can also use the magic of [Revelation]... The magic to transmit to others what I know from my spirit sense."

"Eh!? Ma-mariya, why didn't you say so earlier? This should have been the final solution!"

Slowly, Yuri shifted towards Godou's body. She avoided making eye contact with Godou. Despite that, her embarrassment even made her neck red, while she slowly moved towards him.

Her hair draped across Godou's face. His nose invaded by the sweet fragrance, Godou really wanted to flee immediately.

However, he couldn't. The body still could not move. A hopeless situation.

"If it is not mouth, mouth to mouth, then it does not work on Kusanagi-san—right?"

"That's right, but why? Umm, Mariya? You don't have to go so far!"

"Same here. If possible, I do not want to do this either... But it would be very serious if this was not done... If Erica-san cannot be found then I must be prepared to do this... Do not let your thoughts wander to some place strange. Let me clarify beforehand that I am not doing this because I admire Kusanagi-san. It is not like that, absolutely not. As a miko, if there is a necessity and no other choice, only then will this be done...!"

Yuri finally looked at Godou straight.

Moist eyes.

Her body trembled, unable to contain the sense of shame and her own daring behavior.

Slowly approaching were the accommodating lips.

Unlike the bold and unrestrained Erica, it carried unfamiliarity and embarrassment, a stiff kiss.

—Phoebus.[17]

As if by chance, this word appeared in Godou's mind.

Spell words. From Yuri's lips came spell words. However, this level was not enough. Understanding a god's wisdom, mysterious knowledge, the god's name and its nature—all were not enough.

"K-Kusanagi-san. Please, for my sake—Open your heart to me... The hearts must become one. If our hearts do not come together, you and I, then there is no point. I too—I too will try my best!"

Yuri pressed her weight down and took initiative from above.

Holding Godou's face between her hands, she pressed her lips down forcefully. The clumsy but powerful movement seemed to express her determination.

—However, this was only an instant.

Very soon, Yuri lost strength. She quietly opened her mouth and gently covered Godou's lips.

"Please feel my... please feel the figure of the god from within my heart, the form and the nature of the god I see... Let everything I see—completely transmit to you."

A warm body and soft lips.

As she showed a face that almost seemed to cry from embarrassment, her body trembled from nervousness, but Yuri had no intention of stopping.

Ten seconds, twenty seconds. As time passed, there were no signs of her lips letting go.

Feeling suffocated, Godou tried to seek air and loosened his lips slightly.

In that instant, Yuri used an even more intense motion to press her lips back upon Godou's lips which had quietly separated. Like the tightly fitted shell of a clam. An even deeper kiss than before.

The two of them exchanged saliva, entangling with each other, melting together.

Even at this level, there was a certain indescribable sense of satisfaction and unity of body. Each other's existence felt closer than anything or anyone else, and had a warm feeling.

An intense feeling of faintness attacked Godou. Perhaps Yuri was in the same state.

While their lips pressed together, they stared with passionate eyes at each other—in that very instant.

Finally it came. A strong impression flowed strongly into Godou's mind.

—Small beasts restless in the dark, these were rats.

—Rats, wolves, bears, deer and wild boars. Besides these, there were all sorts of wild beasts. The queen of the beasts. Ruling upon the forest, the mother earth goddess that ruled over darkness.

—From the mother goddess was born a rat which became a wolf, and finally took the form of a youth.

—He was handsome as bright light. However, he was still someone born from darkness. His true nature was darkness and

solitude. He was the sun born from darkness. The god who brought light and disaster.

—He was called Phoebus. In other words, light. The name of the handsome god who could summon rats and wolves.

"I know, Mariya... I now fully understand the true form of the [Wolf]."

"Kusanagi-san..."

Quietly leaving Yuri's lips, Godou immediately said.

Spell words were flowing rapidly within his body, and he could clearly feel the power inhabiting his right hand. Godou's body was host to Verethragna's [Warrior], and this proved that the form of the golden sword had been shaped.

However, this was still not enough!

More weapons were needed to fight the old man.

"...Excuse me. Could you let me say something selfish? Osiris—Mariya, could you tell me what you saw about the other god? To defeat that old gramps, I want to prepare as much as possible."

"Yes. Kusanagi-san—Godou-san, please accept everything I see!"

Who knew if winning were possible?

However, believing that he has gained a powerful weapon, Godou was now full of fighting spirit.

Embracing Godou tightly, Yuri continued to press her lips upon his. The god of death and fertility with green skin—the image of the consort of the mother earth goddess was being transmitted.

At the same time, Yuri's tongue slowly probed deeper, licking against Godou's lips.

Perhaps it was instinctual, however, it wantonly moved throughout Godou's mouth full of temptation. Feeling her seductive motions, Godou immediately let his own tongue move and tangled together with Yuri's tongue.

Ever deeper, ever more intense. Linking hearts together—!

These feelings were carried by the flow. At this time, Yuri's body suddenly shook violently and became stiff.

Suddenly opening her eyes wide, completely shocked.

This was not enough. Give me greater power, give me more impressions!

Feeling those thoughts, Godou also looked at her at the same time.

This went on for tens of seconds. Finally Yuri lowered her eyes shyly, and relaxed her body. Then she accepted deeply Godou's lips and tongue.

Yuri gently used her lips to accommodate the roughly invading tongue, encircling it. The tongue wriggling back and forth within the mouth, sometimes licked softly again and again, while at other times rubbed against the other tongue in a serious manner.

Shyly sucking at Godou's saliva, mixing saliva with her own.

"Whether the [Wolf] god or Osiris, both are deities with the same characteristics. Also, the goddess of the earth and the god of greenery—in the earliest days, he and the goddess had a most unusual relationship."

Leaving Godou's lips once in a while to take a break, Yuri spoke rapidly.

Other than that, she kept her lips overlapping with Godou's, making their hearts one, and single-mindedly transmitted her heart.

"He was once the child of the goddess—the young child born of the mother earth goddess. A lower god with the form of a child. Starting from this he became her husband, became lovers, became siblings. Thus he has intimate relations with the earth. Hence, the [Wolf] god is the earth—meaning a god whose body was born in darkness, but possessing attributes of light... Do you understand, Godou-san?"

"Ah ah, understood. If that's the case, I now have the power to battle against that old gramps...!"

Battle power can summon the will to fight, this was a Campione's characteristic.

Having recovered at some point from the aftereffects of using Verethragna's [Raptor], Godou slowly got up.

As if having found a source of fire, his body was full of power.

Part 3

Once the task ended, Yuri frantically separated from Godou's body.

Hurriedly, she adjusted the front of her white robe. Though not as voluptuous as Erica, her size was just right, and the cleavage between the excellently shaped breasts was visible.

She turned her back to Godou, and was sitting down for some reason.

Her head lowered, shoulders trembling.

Probably because she couldn't accept the shameful conduct she was just engaged in. Godou also felt the same, and could understand her feelings.

—The atmosphere was very bad.

Godou also sat with his legs crossed, watching Yuri's back.

The atmosphere was seriously bad. What should be said? Come on, put some determination and gather your courage to say something.

"Hey, Mariya..."

"P-Please do not mind me! Just now was simply something I did thoughtlessly! Just pretend you got bitten by a wild dog and forget about it!"

In her increasing confusion, words flew out of Yuri's mouth.

"Even if you say so, I can't do that even if I wanted to..."

"B-But, if you do not do that, Godou-san, I-I cannot look you in the eye anymore! To have done something so shameless, it really feels embarrassing..."

They continued the conversation with their faces red while avoiding looking at each other.

If he blamed the problem on her, then he was seriously not a man.

"N-No, you only did this so that I can fight the old gramps. It's not your fault, Mariya. Since I am the one who decided to fight, I should be the one who is responsible instead..."

"Nothing of that sort. Really, please pay this matter no heed!"

"Hmm, hmmhmm... Umm, then let's treat that time as our joint responsibility. It was something we both did together, so that would be more reasonable. How should I say it... I also lost myself in the middle of it... Also there was some feeling like 'please, I am in your care from here on' halfway through..."

"T-That also sounds about right, perhaps it really was like that..."

Sleeping in Godou's mind right now, were two different spell words of the sword.

This was obtained from Yuri, but the second one—the spell words for defeating Osiris the god of the underworld were obtained by Godou himself.

Without this, Voban could not be defeated.

Godou had a premonition. Himself aside, but when faced with battle situations, he would stop considering the surrounding things that mystified him.

Reflect carefully. Godou reminded himself once again.

"And so, I should also apologize. Please accept my apologies..."

"N-No problem. That time was, let us just treat it as us acting rashly..."

Finally handled, Yuri turned her face over.

Her face was still very red, but at least it wasn't confused.

"Sorry for feeling confused so suddenly. From now on I will plan things through more thoroughly before I act, and will carefully reflect upon my actions. Forgive my incompetence, but please take good care of me from now on."

"Ah, yes. It's me who should..."

As Yuri sat, she bowed deeply with her head almost touching the ground.

What was she doing, what was this greeting?

The mood was like the words said before getting married, and Godou felt a sense of dissonance. Nodding to these scripted lines would be a real problem.

"P-Please forget that just now! Looks like I have not yet calmed down. Having said some strange words, I express my apologies once again!"

Even noticing it herself, Yuri's voice was clearly on the rise.

What broke the problematic atmosphere was Godou's cellphone .

This was a normal cellphone without any waterproof features, but surprisingly it lived through unscathed and didn't lose to this storm.

"Ooh, hey! Hello!"

As the phone rang, Godou quickly took out his cellphone.

'—It's me. Are you okay over there? You're with Yuri, right?'

"Ah, yes. I got out after all. Erica, you sound fine, right?"

A completely familiar voice.

The beautiful girl who possessed golden glamor simultaneously with lightness like the blowing wind. Erica Blandelli's image appeared in Godou's mind. Somehow he felt a sense of tension.

...As if sharp knives were arranged against his back, there was a strange sense of terror.

'A lot also happened on this side, but everything is safe and sound for now. As for that Marquis... That important one, sure loves to play.'

"Play?"

'Correct. Have you noticed it? The storm has become stronger, but it is definitely on purpose. Actually, we have already found that person, observing from afar. Keeping his [Wolves] on leash, as if preparing to hunt down you guys. Next is this storm. He could very well want a show.'

"...What poor taste."

'Really? I think a night attacked by a storm could be quite exciting. Anyway, let's meet at some place first. I think I've figured

out Voban's abilities pretty much, but we need to think of counters . I think I can do something against the [Dead Servants]. So try thinking of a way to deal with the [Wolf] authority—'

"Ah... Actually, I think I'm fine with that one already."

'Eh, Godou? How?'

"Well, how should I put it, lots of things happened on this side too, yes."

'...Hmph, lots and lots of things eh. Though I think I can imagine, but may I interview you afterwards?'

It was not an ordinary question but an interrogation. Feeling despair in this sentence, Godou tried to change the subject.

"So that's the situation, just call me from over there. I will fly immediately."

'Got it—Godou's report makes me happy. Let me bully you well afterwards.'

Leaving those ominous words, Erica hung up.

Feeling the kind of heavy atmosphere as if having lit the fuse of dynamite, Godou put away his phone.

"Was it Erica-san calling?"

"Ah yes, she is fine on her side, and also seems to be watching the old man. I will be going over, so it will be best if Mariya could find a place to hide please."

Godou made such a suggestion.

He didn't want Yuri, who lacked the power to defend herself, to get in danger. However, the beautiful Hime-Miko shook her head and refused determinedly.

"No, I must go too... Godou-san, in the battle just now, it is likely that the Marquis held back his offensive power. If he was serious, blowing you away along with the streets should not be impossible. However he did not do that, so I think it was because I am by your side."

So, if Yuri was there then Voban could not make full use of his authorities.

Pondering the likelihood of Yuri's suggestion, Godou fell into silence. To be honest, Godou had also discovered that possibility.

However, he could not involve her for this kind of reason.

"No problem. Compared to hiding and waiting for danger to pass and not doing anything, I would rather do something for you all... Also, have you forgotten?"

Yuri who raised a question, had exceedingly gentle eyes.

"If you lose to the Marquis, I will be caught. So, I simply wish to slightly improve Godou-san's chances of victory. This has an element of selfishness to it, so please do not be concerned about me ."

Making a contrived suggestion that it was for her own interest, to relieve stress for the other person.

Feeling what Yuri worried about, Godou deeply sighed.

Compared to that old man, he was much weaker. In order to obtain victory, he really needed to exhaust all possible advantages available. And above all, the most important was the joint efforts between companions.

Kusanagi Godou was different from Sasha Dejanstahl Voban or Salvatore Doni.

Someone who cannot fight alone, a weak [King].

This has been the case up to now.

If it weren't for Erica or Yuri, as well as a good number of additional friends and companions, Godou would not have become a Campione, and definitely would not have obtained victory again and again.

—One day, if only he could reach the point where he wouldn't need to borrow another's power, but before that—

Godou made his decision.

It was not yet the time, so please lend me your strength. In return, whenever there was someone who truly needed his own power—he will offer his power without hesitation. This was the so-called principle of equivalent exchange.

"I'm sorry, I said something naive. Then could you accompany me for a while?"

"Of course. We are born of one fate—let us do our best together. "

Yuri's lips showed a peaceful smile.

Godou would sometimes take notice of her, that mild gentle smile which was unsurpassed by any other girl. However, that smile suddenly vanished.

"—O King. Should you ever forget these feelings, there will be new powers held by that hand. When you guide the flock of lost sheep, the horned guiding beast will perform the sacrificial rite upon your head."

With a solemn and hollow gaze, Yuri spoke. Was this a warning , or constitutional advice—no, an oracle?

"Agile and clever goat, once compared to the great god of the sky worshiped by the people of the horse. Guide the lost sheep, wise elder. Please keep this in your heart."

"..."

"—What? What did I just say?"

"...Nothing much, you didn't say anything important."

It was likely the miko's spirit sense which caused her to speak just now.

Godou was amazed at the infinite depths that Yuri's potential seemed to possess.

However, what was the guiding beast? Sheep, or was it talking about goats? Just as Godou was starting to ponder.

—Kusanagi Godou! Your knight calls for you. Please descend once again, and fulfill your obligations as king!

From somewhere riding upon the wind came a girl's voice.

It was the sound of Erica calling. Looks like it was finally time to decide the battle against Voban.

As the companion who risked her life chanted that name, Godou received the power of flight from Verethragna's [Wind].

"Let's go. Let's give that old gramps some pain!"

"Very well, Godou-san! No matter where you go I will accompany you!"

Yuri tightly gripped Godou's outstretched hand.

One fate.

With this determination, the two of them rode the turbulent wind and flew towards the sky.

Chapter 7 - Wind, Rain, Wolf

Part 1

As the storm ravaged the night, it was somewhere not far from the Tokyo Tower—

Anyone with some slightly normal sense would not venture outside in such unfavorable weather.

No, even a person with particularly urgent things to do would not choose to go outside, due to this level of wind, rain, and thunder.

Within the storm, an old man stood, wearing a black jacket with joyful laughter on his face.

"Hahahahahaha! Search and go hunt! Tonight is such a wonderful night! My hunting hounds, find my prey!"

Dejanstahl Voban yelled loudly.

Very quickly, tens of [Wolves] took form in the darkness behind him, and started racing across the city in the night. As if carrying his laughter, the wind strengthened, and the lightning became more violent.

The screams of the wind and the sound of thunder, heavy rain striking the ground with fierce sounds, all these dominated the city night.

Without any signs of people on the streets, the cars on the roads also disappeared.

In other words, it would not have been an exaggeration to say it had turned into a city without people. Voban who yelled arrogantly was like a king of the wasteland.

"Ah, getting so excited. He looks really happy."

The one who appeared to admire with sincerity was the History Compilation Committee member, Amakasu Touma.

Beside him was Liliana Kranjcar. As she peeked at the one who sort of counted as a dignified old man, she showed a slightly shocked expression.

"Especially this tasteless act. It is as if he had not found entertainment for a long time until now... Really, an anachronistic tyrant should just enjoy his secluded life!"

"However, a life of sitting in the balcony under the sun and growing old... Something like that is no good—"

Erica Blandelli deliberately played the devil's advocate against her old friend.

—It was near Shiba Park in the Minato ward.

They had discovered the old Devil King and hid in a dark spot of some building to witness this scene.

Roughly thirty minutes ago, Erica had brought Liliana over to her cause, and disarmed hateful complaints one after another with a smile as they searched for Voban.

Liliana, who was even skilled at divination, had divined the Marquis' location.

Moving in the direction the divination indicated, they met Amakasu.

As Erica and Liliana walked together, a car stopped on the road, suddenly opened its door and out appeared his figure.

Opening a black umbrella and walking out into the heavy rain.

However, the umbrella was immediately blown away. Amakasu shook his head as if saying "can't stand this," gave up, and simply let his suit take in water from the rain. At the same time, he spoke.

"Meeting here must be fate then, let's go... So, could you introduce this young lady with you, Erica-san? Actually, I seem to have met Liliana Kranjcar-san somewhere before?"

Having said that, the three of them stood together.

"So Amakasu-san, may I ask you a question?"

"No problem, as long as I know the answer. However, weight and the three measurements are secrets, yes?"

To the History Compilation Committee member who answered frivolously, Erica threw him a vicious stare.

"Actually, starting from just now I realized. You... no, the reason why Godou was requested in this affair."

Erica was questioning using subtle acrimonious tones.

Amakasu played dumb and laughed, his calm and relaxed facade did not falter.

"Actually we are very worried about Erica-san as well. Isn't it normal to negotiate with the side which has the ability to do something?"

"So how is it? When someone close to him is caught in danger, Godou will take action without thinking clearly. Ignoring some sacrifices, fighting the Marquis could turn out to be a good opportunity to push Godou forward in harnessing his potential... So to speak. Am I overthinking things?"

"You overthought this. After all, we of the History Compilation Committee are all respectable civil servants. Our first consideration is the welfare of the Tokyo residents and the Japanese nation."

Erica elegantly gave off an air of acute sarcasm.

Amakasu, though clearly insincere, had a face that somehow one could not hate.

Listening to the conversation of the two, Liliana whispered with a lack of good will.

"Conversations like those between foxes and bats should take place somewhere else. Putting that aside, what should be done now? Is Kusanagi Godou in this direction?"

"Yes in this direction, how should I put it, it's that he should be in this direction."

Erica answered, thinking of the phone call just now.

...Of course, one could not be careless with a man like Kusanagi Godou. Though he clearly lacked outstanding social skills, he keeps attracting all these strange people.

Perhaps this was part of a king's disposition. A dependable existence, but not very amusing.

The plan to bring Liliana over to his side turned out to be enacted early and succeeded far beyond expectation. ...One must take note of this in the future.

Fooling around with newcomers would be fine. This was the privilege of a king. However, he cannot be forgiven if he gets serious.

The one whom Kusanagi Godou truly loves above all can be no one else but Erica Blandelli.

"To carve this principle deep into the soul, truly has to begin from childhood... With that kind of personality, the chances of him becoming a parent who spoils his children is rather high..."

"What is it, Erica? What are you uttering so softly about?"

Erica shook her head at Liliana's question.

The current priority was to deal with Marquis Voban. One must concentrate.

"Ah ah, excuse me, it's nothing, don't mind it. —Let's start. Kusanagi Godou and Dejanstahl Voban, the second round of the duel between [Kings]."

Erica and Liliana stepped forward side by side.

They stepped towards where the old Devil King was summoning wind, rain and thunder, laughing madly.

Under the intense thunderstorm, the two girls finally faced off against the elderly king.

"Ohoh, finally out of the house? Too late. —Oh, Kranjcar seems to have joined her rival, but why? Shouldn't you be following me?"

Voban glanced sideways at the girl beside Erica and spoke.

He could immediately tell that Liliana had changed her loyalties . His twisted eyes were full of certainty.

"I express my deepest apologies. Liliana Kranjcar would now request to be withdrawn from your services. Please forgive me for refusing to stain my chivalry by participating in the kidnapping of the weak and womenfolk."

"Dare to refuse the tyrannical king? Foolish! However, this may well be the role model of a knight."

Voban smiled generously.

"Killing you by my own hand and letting you join the ranks of the [Dead Servants] will suffice. Without a doubt, that [Diavolo Rosso] will accompany you as well. You won't be lonely eh? Girls with the disposition of wolves, you are worthy to become warriors under me."

The darkness became restless once again.

Warriors, with sturdy bodies and wearing ancient battle attires, were born out of the darkness.

"I can't let you be mistaken, so let me teach you all. These people—[Dead Servants] can only be truly released from my shackles by the state of my death. So just now, for those knights you defeated with your own hands, do not mistakenly believe that they will obtain peace. They have simply turned into dust once more, returning to the ground, and after some time will return to my shackles once again... My domination is eternal."

Out of the storm dozens of death knights appeared.

It was true. From amongst the defeated knights, there were now two that looked identical to them. As expected of an authority usurped from the gods, ordinary methods did not work.

Witnessing the power of her enemy, Erica instead showed an arrogant smile.

"A king's words cannot be false. However, may I be so bold as to make a correction. We are not your opponents. Have you forgotten this fact?"

"I'm not that old and senile. However, where is that beloved brat of yours?"

The nature of Voban's smile changed.

In the smile of the king who was familiar with his absolute power, a composed warrior's hearty laughter from the boiling of hot blood could be seen.

"That kind of brat can't even satisfy my hunger a tiny bit. A newborn king can only be at this level. However if that guy—can let me witness the power that overcame the other brat Salvatore, then I shall amend my words. Tonight, is a rare moment for my blood to boil from excitement. The chance to enjoy fighting to my heart's content!"

Neither for the power to bury gods, nor for ruling the earth.

Only to enjoy a good battle.

A power that only existed for battle and conflict.

The king whose body had existed for centuries, who chose solitude and abandoned territory and subjects instead, to the old king's roars, Erica nodded.

"If that's the case, king, then you shall confirm for yourself. — Kusanagi Godou! Your knight calls for you. Please descend once again, and fulfill your obligations as king!"

Taking a slight bow, raising her voice to call for that name.

Riding upon the blowing winds, out spoke the spell words calling forth the young king.

—Soon, the wind formed a vortex in front of Erica's eyes.

—Away from the overflowing spell power, Liliana retreated in surprise.

Suddenly in the center of the wind, out appeared Kusanagi Godou and Mariya Yuri dressed in her miko outfit.

"You have kept me waiting long enough, brat. Making an elder wait so long, what a rude fellow. As expected of the ally of that brat Salvatore."

"Excuse me. However, comparing me with that kind of person makes me mad."

Voban who treated the enemies appearing before him as idiots, and Godou who responded with haughty battle spirit.

It was the moment the two kings met again.

Part 2

"Mariya, why don't you wait at the back. It's probably better than staying right beside me."

"Yes. No matter what, please be safe."

Listening to Godou's directions, Yuri nodded sincerely.

She reluctantly let go of the hand she was holding tightly during the flight via Verethragna's [Wind], and got off from Godou's body. Without a trace of uncertainty, it was a very good expression.

The place where Yuri ran towards, had Erica—as well as another person.

"Eh? You are from just now..."

"I am Liliana Kranjcar. I hurried here at full speed to join under your banner, Kusanagi Godou. Though I never wanted to serve the same master as that female fox, I have judged your side to be the side of justice on this occasion. I hope you can understand the reasons of my actions."

Liliana spoke rapidly as she glared at her longtime acquaintance .

Easily ignoring her gaze, Erica supplemented with a devilish smile from goodness knows where.

"That's right. This is very important. Justice. It was also written in the notebook of someone..."

"Quiet! ...You will get your just deserts one day."

Liliana said with a frown.

Noticing some kind of back story, Godou felt sympathy for her. It must have been a difficult life getting along with that devil for so long.

"There's probably nothing to gain from following me. It's fine, you don't have to force yourself..."

"That is already understood, it is fine."

Liliana simply cut Godou off.

Even though she was complaining, her face showed a happy expression.

With dreamlike beauty like a fairy's, it felt like she had finally let go of something and obtained the will to advance forward into the future.

"Ok, thanks. Let's beat up that abominable old man together then."

The knight who was brought over by Erica's scheming.

Not only was she capable and had her own principles, she was lending her power. That deserved thanks. Liliana shyly fled from Godou's gaze of gratitude.

"Thanks are not needed. It is a knight's duty to assist the king. Furthermore, you are doing this to save a friend and a lady. ...Well, as the master of that female fox, you have earned very few starting points, but no matter, this is within acceptable bounds."

Very strict words.

This was already established in the first impression. This girl was unexpectedly abrasive in response to unnecessary concern from others. If one were to imagine from that doll-like face, one would likely conclude that she was one of those characters that were tough but satisfying to win over.

With a forced smile, Godou generously nodded his head in response.

"That's enough. I am in your debt. —Then, old man over there, let's go."

"Hmph, you sure talk too much about the most trivial of things. As a warrior, please do not be distracted when facing enemies. Immature one!"

Unfazed, Godou retorted against the criticisms of the old man.

"Immature doesn't need to be said, Captain Obvious. As a substitute, I have my trusted companions. You probably pride yourself on your solitary superiority, right?"

"This brat really knows how to bark. So, let's see who has more bite!?"

Voban waved his hand downwards.

Immediately, the death knights behind him moved at his call.

Unsheathing their swords, raising their spears, to kill and defeat Godou! The first to approach were two knights, one red and the other blue, who summoned magic swords.

"Lily, there is no need to defeat the death knights. We just need to protect Godou properly. That is our priority!"

"Any other strategy? Understood!"

To Godou's right was Erica, while Liliana took the left.

Cuore di Leone and Il Maestro—the two magic swords traced spectacular paths nonstop, forming an impenetrable wall protecting Godou from the death knights.

In terms of battle strength, the two of them were probably very close to, if not equal to the enemies before them.

Compared to the dead who could only faithfully follow the orders of their master, there was an advantage to instant and

flexible decision making and agile evasion. Furthermore, their base capabilities had negligible differences.

This was true even though they were outnumbered.

The ten or more death knights were intercepted by the two people Erica and Liliana.

Still, Voban continued to summon servants out of the darkness—a mobile army of corpses.

Amongst these warriors who resembled medieval knights, there were also soldiers armed with muskets fitted with bayonets.

Corpses who wrapped their bodies with cloth and rope, swinging battle axes. There were also dead people who wore military uniforms dating from the earlier half of the twentieth century, and carrying what appeared to be ancient rifles. As if turning back time, there was a giant man who looked like a Viking from some unknown era. Amongst the dead, there were also those who wore Middle Eastern or Chinese attire.

The [Dead Servants] whose ranks included a haphazard mix of all sorts of time periods, nationalities, and ethnicities—

The firearms they carried appeared to be in no condition to fire. The blades in their hands were badly maintained, and heavily rusted.

Even so, they were swarming in and swinging their weapons.

—Erica and Liliana did not back down at their opponents the [Dead Servants].

The dead attacked in bunches again and again.

Once again, Erica had split Cuore di Leone into thirteen parts to be controlled.

The magic sword of the lion floated in the sky like a ferocious bird of prey, and then flew, slicing continuously at the [Dead Servants]. Against the most powerful death knights, Erica stopped them by swinging her sword personally.

Liliana stayed off the ground for the most part.

She stood on the dead people's heads, shoulders, and even on their weapons, jumping around and flying without restriction. From above, she attacked from the air with her magic sword again and again, neutralizing her enemies.

They completely avoided overextending themselves.

Against the strongest death knights, they used hindering attacks and never engaged for too long.

However, against the weakest servants, the magic swords attacked their fatal vulnerabilities with merciless abandon. Within a short while, many of them were removed from battle. In truth, the tactics of the two could be seen as despicable, but extremely solid.

Completely low risk.

Erica never left Godou's side, while Liliana never ventured too deep.

What remained constant was guarding Godou above all else. This was possible due to the capabilities and judgment of the two.

"I didn't want to do this originally, but there's no other way!"

"Same for me! But, now what? Do you have a plan!?"

Even in a situation like this, the two of them did not give off any sense of tragedy.

Seeing Erica and Liliana kicking away the dead, Godou had mixed feelings.

Though obedient, they were the victims killed by Voban's hand.

The tragic fate of those who resisted the devil king and opposed him, but ended up defeated. As these people fell and stayed on earth as servants, they continued to fight for Voban after their deaths.

Of course, Verethragna's authorities weren't anything good either, but there were still limits.

—If he could, liberating them was the first thing Godou wanted to do.

Godou sighed.

In terms of strategy, it would be unwise. It was already established that the power of Erica and Liliana was sufficient to hold off the [Dead Servants]. It would be better to save his trump card for something else.

Ending the summoning of more [Dead Servants], Voban approached with casual footsteps.

Eyeing the powerful old king, Godou spoke decisively.

"...Hey. Do you remember the first god you killed?"

"Why are you bringing this up, boy? What does that have to do with you?"

Voban sneered.

His form changed. From man to werewolf, and then to a wolf—

Was that really all there is to it, other than turning into a giant wolf? Knowing the destructive power of Verethragna's [Boar], Godou believed that this [Wolf] was the ability that he must be the most wary of.

Voban's body expanded after transforming into a wolf.

Once again, the vigorous body of the giant silver wolf returned, a terrifying embodiment of violence.

—Currently in Godou's heart, resided two swords.

However, the [Warrior] could only wield one sword at a time, and he must choose between them. Godou must decide between sealing the [Dead Servants] or the [Wolf]. This was a choice he must make, no other way around it.

Casting his last doubts aside, Godou began to chant the spell words.

"I know it. That bastard of a god you killed—the wolf god hanging around like night, hating mankind, I know it!"

The light shined with brilliance and glory.

The [Sword] of the spell words to kill gods. Shining with golden splendor, it formed numerous spheres of light and scattered.

"Once known as Phoebus—the god whose name had the meaning of light. However, he was also the god with the night-like epithet 'nukti eoikôs.'[18] A bastard deity who possessed a massive contradiction between his appearance and his nature, that was the god you killed."

The golden [Sword] fluttered in the air amidst spell words.

Looking up, the view was mostly dominated by the giant wolf form of Voban—his silver fur and the strong body of a wolf, were being shredded in a crisscross manner.

Oh oh oh oh oh oh oh oh oh oh oh oh oh oh oh !!

'—What, what is that power!'

Carrying roars and surprise, his yelling also echoed.

"That ancient epithet Smintheus. —It means rat. And then there is Lykaon, Lyeios... words containing the meaning of wolf. The god of light whose origins stemmed from rats and wolves—the beasts of the earth and darkness. This is the key to interpreting this god!"

This was the figure and nature of the god that Yuri observed.

Obtaining that knowledge, Godou felt the spell words flowing out continuously from somewhere deep inside him.

This was different from the times when Erica used spells to transmit knowledge. Though his mind was totally blank, his mouth spoke on its own. As his tongue moved without pause, spell words were spoken continuously.

Using the heart to capture the god's form—and then speaking out the images. Simple as that.

"The wolf with the essence of a rat, and the god who possessed dual attributes of light and night—in other words, Apollo. The twin brother of the moon goddess Artemis, the sun god who locked away darkness but was born underground! This is the name of the first god you killed!"

Oh oh oh oh oh oh oh oh oh oh oh oh oh oh !!

'The spell words with the power to sever a god's power! Is this your trump card? Interesting!'

Voban roared stubbornly.

From the fur of the giant silver wolf, numerous [Wolves] were born. Each strand of fur transformed, turning into bodies the size of normal wolves, and started racing through the air.

The golden [Sword] brought color to the night sky swirling with wind and rain.

The light of the spell words twinkled like stars, and flew towards the silver wolf pack jumping through the air.

In order to devour the [Sword], which flew back and forth around the giant wolf, the [Wolves] constantly lunged at the lights and attempted to bite them. However, the [Sword]'s spheres of light simply advanced from within the [Wolves]' mouths to cut their vigorous bodies into halves.

Watching the victories repeating in the air several, no, dozens of times, Godou's determination continued to get fired up.

Let's attack in one fell swoop!

"Apollo's twin sister Artemis is the goddess of the hunt—one of the pillars amongst the powerful mother earth goddesses. The mother of these siblings is the great earth goddess Leto. And Apollo was once a deity belonging to the temple of the earth."

Apollo's epithets appeared one after another.

Apollo of Light [Phoebus Apollo]. Apollo of Rats [Apollo Smintheus]. Apollo of Wolves [Apollo Lykeios]. Apollo of Disaster [Apollo Loxias].

This sun god had many little known contradictions. Godou once killed time at home by reading a pocket-sized edition of the Iliad. He found it quite strange at the time.

The beginning of the Homeric hymn described how 'Apollo took on the guise of the dark night.'

And then the god brought pestilence against the Achaean army. The eternally handsome youth. The sun god who loved and admired beauty. It was hard to connect his appearance with the descriptions of the things he did.

"As proof of this, there exists a deep link between the earth and the beasts which symbolized him. Rats, wolves and swans—as well as snakes. Those tiny rats, restless in the darkness, could very well be Apollo's original form. The wolves used by his sister Artemis as servants, was the form of Apollo as the guardian dog of the underworld. The swan was also a symbol of the link between earth and the underground. Finally there is the snake—as one of the major symbols of most mother earth goddesses, it represents the cycle of life and death."

Powered by Godou's spell words, the golden [Sword] flew across the sky.

[Wolves] continuously flew out from the body of the giant wolf, trying to rip, bite and resist these swords.

The brilliant light of gold and silver fought fiercely, showering the area with sparks.

The eerie blaze of the supernatural aerial battle was carried out in a narrow region of the stormy night sky.

"However, the snake which appeared in Apollo's myth was neither his companion nor his relative. It is the monster that he killed—which is why snakes appear. It is the serpent Python which guarded the sacred land of the Delphic oracle. In the past, the young Apollo slew the serpent with his bow and arrows, thus becoming the god of the oracle."

Ooh ooh ooh ooh ooh oh oh oh oh oh oh oh oh oh oh oh oh oh oh oh oh oh oh oh ooh ooh ooh ooh ooh ooh!!

As if trying to disperse Godou's spell words, Voban roared.

Unable to resist the [Sword], the forms of the silver wolves disappeared as they met defeat repeatedly. The giant wolf with a monstrous body kicked at the ground, causing massive shaking on the surrounding surface.

The attack's direction was aimed at Godou, obviously.

Since the weapon could not be defeated, attacking the controller was the logical choice. However, that was easy to handle.

"Python was the great serpent born from the mother earth goddess Gaia. Apollo had killed the serpent and became the patron of Delphi. Henceforth, his priestesses were called Pythia and delivered the oracle to those who came to seek the sacred Delphic oracle. —In other words, Apollo is the god who successfully killed a fellow brethren deity belonging to the earth."

Godou strung the golden swords together and gathered the brightness.

If he attacked here in a straight line, it would be just right. He will sever Apollo's divine power with one slice, and disarm Voban's weapon!

"The underground which connects the earth to the underworld, symbolized darkness. What dispels darkness is light—sunlight. As a god born from the earth, Apollo also embodied the light which existed to kill his mother. Hence, his true nature has attributes of light mixed into darkness—and became the god of disaster Loxias. "

Giving off light brighter by several fold, a golden flash sliced at the giant wolf horizontally.

Immediately, the giant body was destroyed. Shrinking, it turned back into the form of a skinny old man.

"...I see now, the spell words which can overcome my authority. Such an annoying special move."

Though clearly injured, Voban stood upright and unfazed.

Passion and calm, iron will and glory, all these were mixed together and shone from the eyes of the ancient and powerful one as he glared at Godou.

"An ability to adapt oneself against different situations. What a rare power... Amongst the current [Kings], John Pluto also has a similar ability. These types of authorities usually have restrictions. As long as I know the rules which bind you, victory can be easily obtained."

Hmph. Though blood dripped from his forehead, Voban's lips showed a crooked smile.

Godou heightened his alertness. The power of the old man's [Wolves] probably hasn't been suppressed completely. When it struck, Godou felt that the impact was very light.

Seeing through the nature of the [Sword]'s spell words, Voban had halted his attacks just before the critical moment.

"Don't worry, with your level of ability, it is still too soon to present a challenge. I will attack you straight on."

The [Dead Servants] received Voban's orders, and changed their movements.

Up until now, they had been attacking without pattern. But now they suddenly became extremely well organized. They temporarily retreated away from around Godou to regroup, and then attacked in waves.

"Damn it! They are here again! So troublesome!"

"Just when I thought it was getting too easy, but this will be bad !"

Liliana and Erica were having difficulty holding them off, and clearly showed signs of anxiety.

First, the weaker servants were used to take the frontal assault. When they occupied Erica and Liliana, the great knight level corpses immediately attacked.

Clearly, Voban was manipulating the [Dead Servants] with his invisible will.

"You were trying to solve the riddle of Apollo, right? Correct, the first god I defeated was Apollo, and my wolf was the sacred beast authority I usurped from him. However, your spell words—will they be effective against any god other than Apollo?"

Controlling the dead was part of Osiris' authority, but even though he was aware of that fact, Godou could do nothing about it . No matter what, the [Warrior] form could only seal Apollo's divine power.

It looks like Voban changed his method of attack in order to find the limits of Godou's [Sword].

Erica and Liliana swung their magical swords and continued to battle. Though they fought without respite, the tide of battle had turned against them. Just as Godou agonized that he was being protected by two girls—

"Godou-san!"

Yuri's voice yelled out from behind him.

"Please use the sword for vanquishing Osiris! You should have fulfilled that condition!"

"It's true, but I have already used the [Sword] to seal Apollo..."

Without enough remaining strength to answer, Godou could only whisper softly.

Each of Verethragna's incarnations could only be used once a day. Furthermore, when using the [Warrior], the target had to be decided beforehand.

"Don't give up! Whether Apollo or Osiris, both were originally deities with extremely similar characteristics. Use the spell words dormant in your body, and forge the [Sword] you need right here!"

Even Yuri spoke of something impossible. As Godou was caught in surprise, he surveyed the situation.

Erica and Liliana were already at their limits trying to protect him. Enslaved by the authority of the underworld deity, the servants were fighting even after their deaths, and the old man culprit was just standing there gloating—

If Godou doesn't give it a try, how will he know the result?

Seeing Voban's confident demeanor, Godou felt pity for the [Dead Servants], and apologetic towards his companions in battle, and so he renewed his battle spirit.

"Like Apollo, Osiris was also a god born from the earth!"

The green-skinned god of the underworld, the judge of the dead .

The nature of that god was the harvest brought about by the Nile river valley—bountiful grain symbolized attributes of the earth.

"However, though born from the earth, he differs from the Apollo who became the brilliantly glorious sun god, Osiris is purely a god of the earth and the underworld—the close relative of the mother earth goddess, and just a god of harvest."

Apollo and Osiris were both sons of mother earth goddesses—the root of the earth.

Born in different cultures, but possessing many commonalities in attributes. On this basis, new power flowed into the [Sword].

Speaking out the spell words against Osiris, the power was released to seal the underworld god of the harvest—!

"After becoming the sun god, Apollo finally obtained the guise of the dark night. Night—the world dominated by darkness. The underground where Apollo scurries in the form of a rat is also the world of darkness. In other words, this is the mark of the underworld."

The mother earth goddess, who nurtured all life, was not just a goddess overflowing with love.

Winter brings with it death. Godou had learnt this when fighting Athena, the underworld deity who ruled both the night and the underground. And Osiris was the god of harvest born from the earth.

Crops germinated and grew in spring, were harvested in summer and autumn, and welcomed death in winter.

From death, they were reborn in the next spring, and grew once again.

—In Godou's hand appeared a huge longsword with a golden blade. This was the divine sword forged to vanquish the god of the underworld who went through death multiple times and was resurrected.

Surrounded by ten or twenty layers of [Dead Servants], there was nowhere to go.

Looking at the distance—slightly further than ten meters, the figure of the old king could be seen silently directing the dead's battles like an orchestra conductor.

Aiming at his target, Godou raised his sword.

"Osiris was once cut into pieces and died, resurrecting to become the god of the underworld. The mother earth goddess' responsibilities included bestowing life in spring, harvesting in autumn, and death in winter. As the son of the earth and god of the harvest, Osiris' dominion also included growth in spring, harvest in the fall, and death in winter—thus, both the mother earth goddess who does the killing as well as the harvest god who was killed have many common functions."

The cycle of death and rebirth.

Like Athena who once fought Godou, there were the forms of the underworld deities of death, Isis and Artemis. However, the difference was that Apollo was never killed, only Osiris.

"Apollo did not have the authority to take lives, but instead, he became the god of the sun. Nonetheless, he still had the epithet ' nukti eoikôs' to express death—his past includes being the god of pestilence!"

Instilling the killing spell words, Godou swung the massive [Sword] fiercely.

Golden light given off from the body of the blade lit up the entire battlefield. Light surrounded Erica and Liliana, vanquishing the [Dead Servants].

Immediately, they chased after Voban who commanded from the back like a king piece in chess.

To defend against this attack, the dead warriors used their own bodies to shield the old Marquis.

Godou made a grotesque smile. Their efforts were futile, as long as the target was locked by his aim, there was no meaning to sacrificing themselves for defense.

Will it succeed after all? And the final result was—?

Part 3

At some point, the rain had stopped.

However, the wind had not subsided. The wind was still blowing as violently as ever, and the dark clouds covering the sky continued to rumble with thunder, reaching the ground.

Only the rain stopped. The old man's joyful voice could be heard.

"You really did it. Slaying my [Wolf], and sealing the cage of the [Dead Servants]. Such a troublesome ability does exist after all."

The slicing attack infused with all of Godou's liberated spell words.

From the sensation of his hands, Godou felt that the power of Apollo hidden in Voban's body was completely severed. It was likely that he would not be able to use that authority again for a few days. But as for the divine powers of Osiris—

As expected, using the [Sword] for Apollo to slay Osiris was very difficult.

It did not succeed completely. However, it still managed to decrease the number of [Dead Servants]. From a rough estimate, half were destroyed while the remaining half stopped moving.

The spell words of the [Sword] did not completely cut through Voban's power of domination.

Erica and Liliana, who had been fighting nonstop, finally put down their magic swords, breathing slightly heavily.

On the last swing of the [Sword], the [Dead Servants] turned into dust and scattered.

At that time, Godou felt like he heard something from the disappearing servants. What was that, could it have been words of thanks?

The [Sword]'s spell words had cut through Voban's oppression.

The dead did not simply disappear in form, but welcomed true death—they were finally able to rest in peace.

The [Warrior]'s ability included not only the sword, but the sight to see through a god's nature.

That was why Godou understood what happened.

If those were really words of gratitude, it was definitely something to celebrate. It was also worth it at such a great cost... Godou felt his spirits renew as he stomped his trembling foot against the ground.

Giving the [Sword] double spell words has consumed most of Godou's stamina.

His breathing was irregular, and his body felt weak.

Looks like this method of fighting was still beyond the current Godou, who did not expect it be so taxing.

...! ...!

What is going on? Godou felt like someone was speaking.

Erica and Liliana beside him, and starting at some point in time, Yuri with a sorrowful expression, were staring at him. Why was there such a feeling?

"Yes, I would like to commend your bravery. This battle did not disappoint me."

As Voban finished speaking in a low voice...

The wind began to moan.

Godou's body was blown back by a heavy explosion of air pressure.

Using the eyes of the [Warrior], Godou looked at the old king... This was the divine power of the wind, and three figures could barely be seen behind Voban.

Feng Bo,[19] Yu Shi[20] and Lei Gong.[21] These names floated into Godou's mind.

Deities from China, or was it Korea? Probably the storm gods defeated by Voban. Affecting their appearances was what the old man possessed, the authority ruling over wind, rain, thunder and lightning.

"Taken as entertainment, it's a bit exciting. As the one who fought Salvatore to a draw, it is acceptable. Perhaps in another two years, you will turn out to be a fine warrior."

The strong winds continued to blow.

Erica who had stepped in front to shield Godou was blown away. Liliana who tried to close the distance between Voban using the magic of flight also met the same fate.

Then came the thunder. As the rumbling noise started up, lightning descended from the sky.

Resistance against all spells was a Campione characteristic which Godou gambled upon.

...As the one who holds all victory in my hands, I am the strongest. All enemies, all who harbor enmity will be vanquished. Chanting the hymn to Verethragna, he activated magical power all over his body.

It's working, the flash that should have landed on Godou's head missed his body by a slim margin.

The charred asphalt gave off a burnt smell.

The high temperature caused by the thunder vaporized rain drops in the air... If this continued, defeat would be imminent.

"How relentless. It was already apparent, boy, that you share similarities with my past self. To obtain a [King]'s authority without any magical knowledge. And to skillfully wield with determination and wisdom, these powers that a mage could never obtain through training, this was the path I once trod."

With another flash, this time it was lightning.

It was already a feat to escape the spear of the thunder god descending from the sky, and his body felt very hot. Perhaps Godou had already been burnt quite severely.

This time he was suddenly hit by a sudden gust of strong wind, and his whole body was blown away.

—Lost.

Though Godou felt weak and his legs were unstable, he glared at Voban.

Even if his body was in full health, he did not have a way to evade wind and thunder. From the start, there existed a disheartening difference in power. But no matter how tired his body felt, Godou still pushed himself to struggle and stand up.

The shaking of his knees was impossible to control. If this continued, he will be abused to death. Godou showed a displeased expression.

"Godou-san!"

"Godou!"

"Stand up, Kusanagi Godou! You have already fought to this point, show me your resolve!"

Voices were heard. Yuri, Erica, as well as Liliana. Everyone was fine, and the voices of who else?

...! ...! ...!

There really were voices, but who were they? It sounded like a lot of people, their voices carried from a far distance.

Ten people, twenty people, no, there were many more. Where were all these people? It could barely be heard, but it sounded like pleas of "Get up and fight!"

The voices did not stop, the voices of the crowd, the voices seeking power, the voices praying for salvation. Godou lifted his head, looked around and understood in an instant.

Assured of the power's existence, Godou mastered the characteristics of the new form.

This sense of omnipotence was the sweet yet dangerous sensation felt when a Campione struggles to reach a new stage. I will not lose, declared Godou in his heart.

Such a strange power actually existed, and Godou's determination was renewed.

"—O Guardian of the righteous, I invite you and offer sacrifice. O Guardian of the righteous, I praise you, and beseech you. One who supports the sky and develops new land, the one who grants victory and grace, I will perform justice, please grant to me the right path and light!"

Battle spirit rising straight towards the sky, the spell words erupted.

The completely new form—it was Verethragna's ninth form, the [Goat] which transformed from the [Warrior].

In that instant, Voban released lightning.

The flash descended from the sky. However, Godou caught it directly.

His palm covered with lightning, he had caught the attack as if it was a baseball. Light erupted from his hand, and waves of heat could be felt. Strong energy was also being released.

Do not think that you are the only one with power over lightning!

Feeling joy that he could finally counterattack, Godou relaxed the corner of his lips, and threw the ball of thunder back.

"—What?"

As expected of the one who could direct wind, rain, thunder and lightning.

With the sound of rumbling, the old king deflected the path of the lightning which should have gone straight.

"So that is also your power, boy! To think you even had this level of battle ability...!"

Due to the joy of battle, Voban's expression was radiant.

Godou nodded silently.

This was a power that he did not have the capacity to use alone. Despite Godou's battles till now, this was a power which would never have awakened without the victory wishes of those who were defeated by Voban.

—The will to defeat that man.

—The wish to stop the old man, and the hope to seal him.

Numerous people were asking, begging, praying, hoping—the power of feelings, the power of hearts was concentrated here and formed a vortex like a hurricane. Godou could now hear them clearly.

The voices of lost souls gathered here.

And that was not all.

There were the cries of the souls who were finally released after the [Sword] severed Osiris' power of domination.

They did not know where they would go henceforth.

Heaven, hell, underworld, nirvana, temple of salvation, or promised land... These souls would probably be directed to their final resting place according to their various religions and cultures. It must be so. However to these souls, their final wish was to witness their enemy's demise—the old king who had enslaved them for so long.

Furthermore, Godou not only sensed the feelings of the dead.

—Worrying about the intense thunderstorm and violent winds.

—Fear of the constant roaring of thunder started just now.

—Concerns of the giant shadow seen for an instant outside the window... That form of a monstrous dog, and doubting their own sanity.

— Within the typhoon, there appeared to be some kind of gang fight, and the feeling of being scared to death.

Even the feelings of the residents nearby could be felt clearly.

Godou originally thought that there would be very few people outside due to the weather and the strange happenings, but to think that there were so many people around here. This caused him to worry, because he wanted to keep collateral damage to a minimum.

Amongst the vortex of thoughts and feelings, Godou focused on those closer to him.

—The feelings of the girl who worried about Godou's body, and prayed for his safe return with all her heart.

—The heart of the noble maiden who risked all her courage to beg for Godou's victory.

After making contact with Yuri and Erica's hearts, power flowed out as if without limit. Within the body of the Campione, it was as if new life was infused, it would be too shameful to lose now!

"Grant me power! Grant me the power to defeat Voban!"

Godou shouted, his arm raised towards the sky.

At the same time, the sky was layered with the heavy thunderclouds summoned by Voban. There was no lack of weapons!

The sound of thunder. Lightning descended from the sky continuously.

Verethragna's ninth form was the [Goat]. This form allowed one to listen to the hearts of the people, and wield thunder as weapons.

The lightning summoned from the sky was captured just as it was about to explode in front of Godou, and gave off sparks.

The thunder that should have crashed upon the ground halted, and then began to gather.

The energy of light and heat was released all at once.

Faced with the wave of thunder and lightning swarming him like a turbulent flow, the old Campione exercised his own authorities, and through the exploding flashes of light, the two [Kings] vied for supremacy.

Intending to defeat the old man with thunder was Godou, while Voban was trying to push the thunder away.

Neither side was winning.

No, Godou had the advantage, and the rapid thunderstrike engulfed Voban.

However, the old man's body only received minor burns, and could endure longer. He was just barely able to avoid his vitals from being struck directly by the thunder and lightning that should have consumed him completely, bones and all.

"...Looks like you've created something that imitates a lightning rod, old man."

Godou laughed loudly, but he was counterattacked at that instant.

Mixed with raindrops a whirlwind swept over, forming a mini hurricane which swallowed Godou.

"By the power of the spell words, I sing the hymn to victory!"

Godou used Verethragna's hymn to raise his magical power.

Enduring the force of Voban's hurricane, Godou consumed his magical power. If it was Godou in the past, he would have been swept into the sky and dropped down to the ground forcefully.

However he was now able to escape the hurricane.

Similar to the way Voban defended against the lightning, just as Godou was engulfed by the wind, he struggled to maintain his form, not letting his feet hover more than a few dozen centimeters off the ground.

Magical power strengthened spells and authorities from afar.

After taking the [Goat]'s form, what used to be most difficult to control, could be performed much faster and more skillfully than before.

"You... That is a mage technique. To suddenly awaken such an ability, you really are a reckless fellow, there is neither rule nor reason to your authorities!"

"I really don't want to hear criticisms from someone like you!"

Godou replied unhappily to Voban's questioning.

Though they both realized that defeating the other was not an easy task, the two kings released lightning simultaneously.

In the red-hot battle of thunder, the intense but fruitless shooting match began.

Part 4

"The power to control lightning... Kusanagi Godou's authority is based on the powers of Verethragna's ten forms, right? So which form is it?"

"Ah? Amakasu-san!? You came?"

With the cessation of corpse activity, the battlefield had turned into a one on one duel between Godou and Voban.

Discovering the History Compilation Committee member who popped up suddenly, Yuri was caught by surprise.

"Yes, actually I was here watching from the start... Eh? This is a power not mentioned in the Greenwich report."

"Looks like it. This is also the first time for me to see it—probably it was a form awakened just now."

The one who answered was Erica. Liliana walked over to her side.

In the overly dangerous battle between [Kings], they had kept a safe distance, watching over Godou from afar.

Godou and Voban were firing electrical attacks at each other in an intense battle.

Voban had more weapons, having rain and wind at his disposal in addition to lightning, but that was it. No matter what kind of attack he made, Godou was able to evade skillfully, and greater variety of weapons meant little.

On the other hand, every electrical attack Godou performed was dodged by the experienced Voban.

Though covered with burns and bruises, neither side could deliver a critical hit. They were simply firing cannons at each other in a fruitless battle of attrition.

"This should either be the [Youth] or the [Goat], because it controls thunder—"

"In that case, it must be the [Goat]. For some reason, that is what I feel."

Surprisingly, the last line was spoken by Liliana.

Though it sounded like random guessing, there was substantial confidence behind it. This left Yuri with a deep impression.

Unlike Amakasu or Erica who explained using knowledge, she used instinct to characterize the divine power. Though Liliana was Erica's fellow knight, she was likely the same type as Yuri—a witch with the disposition of a miko.

"Just like that lady said, it is the [Goat] form... The priestly ability in charge of people's hearts and holding the power of thunder."

So what were the characteristics of this form?

In the moment Godou's new power awakened, Yuri immediately understood with her spirit sense. The [Goat] form can be used as long as the people at that location wished to become part of his battle strength.

In terms of people—it was not exclusive to the living.

Collecting the thoughts and feelings of the dead to become energy, and granting Godou the divine power of thunder, was the anger and hatred left behind by the [Dead Servants], as well as their sorrow and pain.

This was likely a powerful form capable of rivaling the [Warrior], the [White Stallion] and the [Boar].

The horned [Goat], was a sacred beast symbolizing great magical power. It would not be too surprising if that form possessed magical power surpassing the strongest wizards and magi.

Since ancient times, [Horns] were the symbol of special magical power.

When priests and kings performed rituals in primitive religions, they would often wear hats or helmets featuring horns, and the purpose was to show that the wearer possessed power.

The deer, the bull, as well as the goat.

The majority of worshiped sacred beasts all had horns. These are remnants of ancient religion faiths.

"Now that it is mentioned, the nomadic Indo-European tribes are thought to have made analogies comparing the goat to lightning in the sky. The famous god of the heavens, Zeus, is also intimately linked to the [Goat], and there are similarities between

it and the legend of the [Horse] carrying the sun. The [Goat] which became lightning was also increasingly promoted as a sacred beast by the Indo-European language family in many places on the continent... So that's why it has that kind of power."

Amakasu looked very happy as usual while he spouted information about Verethragna.

Very interested, Amakasu asked the unsuspecting Yuri.

"As for Kusanagi Godou's authority, there are conditions of use, right? What is it this time that allowed the [Goat] to be used, Yuri-san?"

"That is—"

Just as Yuri was about to answer...

She felt a chill, and stopped herself from uttering the words in her mouth. Though she had doubt from the beginning, she understood instantly. Behind Amakasu, Erica was staring at her, and her eyes were giving a warning.

It was neither sinister nor cold.

However, it was very stern, and contained an unforgiving will. Yuri realized that the conditions of using the ten forms was extremely important information for Godou.

Killing him would not be hard if one had such information in detail.

Of course Amakasu knew this, so for him to deliberately ask such a question, it was natural for Erica to be glaring with full murderous intent that seemed to threaten "I will shut you up if you say something unnecessary."

"...No. About this, I am very sorry that even I do not know."

Not because Erica was frightening.

But because she understood Erica's concerns, Yuri lied.

Kusanagi Godou was still inexperienced with protecting himself from types of malevolence other than violence. In order to keep him safe, she still needed to work extra hard. Was that it?

Satisfied with Yuri's course of action, Erica put away her glare.

"Then nothing can be done about it. Don't worry... yes?"

Feeling disappointed, Amakasu suddenly narrowed his eyes in surprise.

"What is it, Amakasu-san?"

"Nothing, for some reason my body suddenly had a tired feeling... Anyway, Yuri-san are you ok!?"

Knees losing strength, Yuri's body was starting to shake. She had to put all her effort to stand still and stop her shaking legs.

It couldn't be helped, as the body felt like its strength was being sucked away. Even standing up was very difficult.

—Observing closely, Amakasu also seemed to be in the same state. Despite the darkness of the night, it was clear his face did not look well. However, Erica and Liliana were unaffected, and with incredulous eyes, were watching the two people who were losing strength.

Yuri instinctively felt that both their—no, it was likely the life force of everyone in the surroundings, were being gathered at one spot. They were converging at Kusanagi Godou who started releasing thunder to fight a while ago.

This was the [Goat]'s power, no, side effect.

This form was not only the will of the people, but also absorbed their life force and converted it into Godou's power! If Erica and Liliana were fine, it was probably because their original stamina was far beyond ordinary humans.

It was still bearable, but if it continued it might become life threatening.

"...Uh, because this is a form wielding such great power, it comes with a corresponding price? Aya, I really give up."

"Though every time is like this, but Kusanagi Godou's authority is simply full of these inconvenient powers..."

As Yuri explained, Amakasu honestly expressed his annoyance in a rare moment.

Even Erica's eyes were popping out from surprise.

However, Liliana remained optimistic.

"Though that is true, to be able to reach this level and pay such a price is also the privilege of those who are [Kings]. Kusanagi Godou, looks like he turned out to be more capable than I imagined."

She was watching the place where Godou and Voban were having an intense battle of thunder.

The two [Kings] who possessed ultimate resistance against magical power, were turning their own magical power into lightning to attack each other. Even for a Great Knight like Liliana, it was too dangerous to approach and they did not dare venture forward.

They could only watch over from the side—

"Feeling people's hearts and forming a new ability... Though it is difficult to accept his weakness in succumbing to Erica's temptation, he does have a serious side. I am slightly impressed."

Liliana showed a relaxed smile.

A fairy-like beauty with an awe-inspiring flair, this was a knight's smile.

Like Yuri, her miko disposition felt it, that Godou sensed the hearts of the [Dead Servants] which caused the [Goat] form to awaken.

"Erica! Though the battle is even for now, by my estimates, it will inevitably sway in the Marquis' favor. When that happens, you and I will support the king, are you prepared?"

"Who are you talking to? That was exactly what I was going to say, Lily!"

The two knights picked up their beloved magic swords and started bickering.

At that moment, a strange feeling came over Yuri.

—Liliana Kranjcar, a girl whose named sounded like it came from an eastern European country, was standing most naturally with Erica. Red and blue, the twin Great Knights guarding the same king. This description appeared in Yuri's mind without thought.

Noticing Yuri's gaze, Liliana felt strange and asked.

"What is it, Mariya Yuri? Did you finally remember who I am?"

"Eh? Did we meet before?"

"Forget it, if you do not remember, it is fine. It was just a single encounter, so I sort of know you—uh, now is not the time for this kind of chat."

Liliana watched the battlefield with a serious expression once more.

As she predicted, the tides of battle were slowly shifting, and in Voban's favor—

Even in a fight between powerful supernatural entities, stalemates occurred occasionally.

As long as it was more advantageous to defend than to attack, these situations were likely to arise. This was the case with Godou and Voban.

What should have been an instant kill attack was ineffective against both sides. This resulted in stalemate.

However, if the fight dragged on, the battle would sway towards the stronger side. From Voban's expression, Godou subconsciously felt that things were not going his way.

Different from the usual poker face of that old man.

When using his most powerful divine power, Voban abandoned his facade of the old intellectual gentleman, and let his emotions enter a state of madness, roaring with laughter.

Just like when he transformed into the giant silver wolf.

A warrior since birth, though he had aged, his wild side was not lost. A man like a beast, this was the true nature of Dejanstahl Voban that Godou instantly saw clearly.

This man was releasing slow-moving thunderstrikes with a calm expression a while ago.

However, the sky was gathering a frightening amount of heavy thunderclouds. Godou felt difficulty breathing. This was the effect of Voban raising his authority of storms to the maximum.

To think he had the leisure to do that while engaged in a shooting match with Godou.

The strongest violet lightning, this was in preparation for releasing electricity from his entire body.

Godou did not have extra strength to do the same, it was already taking his all to maintain the stalemate.

—This was the difference in power.

The old king and Campione who fought continually over the past three centuries, and the immature one who just debuted. There was an unbridgeable gap between their power levels.

"Boy, I should thank you. To be able to fight to this level, it has really comforted my weary and boring days. Though a little brief, but let me enjoy this!"

Voban smiled.

A grandiose declaration of his victory.

Just as he said, he still had many cards up his sleeve, but up to now he only focused on using the same thunder attack. This was his way of proving his superiority over Godou in the use of thunder.

Anxiety invaded Godou's heart.

If this continued, he will definitely lose.

If he was hit by the full strength lightning attack from a devil king of Voban's level, Godou had no confidence in his own safety. However, there was still another weapon against the old man—

At some point, both sides stopped using lightning.

Voban was preparing for the final strongest attack, while Godou realized continuing to attack was meaningless.

"Godou, you haven't forgotten me, right? Please let your knight Erica Blandelli have a chance to be active. I am your sword and shield. No matter where, we must fight together."

To the right of the troubled Godou appeared a knight dressed in red and black.

Holding Cuore di Leone tightly in her hand, Erica Blandelli stood together with Godou.

"Kusanagi Godou, though I have no wish of spending the rest of my life with you, but at this point in time, I am also your knight. Before the battle ends, let me accompany you."

On his left, appeared the knight dressed in blue and black.

Holding the silver Il Maestro, Liliana Kranjcar stood upright on the left.

"This is too dangerous for you two to be here! Please leave now! "

Godou roared with surprise at the two of them, but their responses were cold.

"It may be as you say, however—if Erica and I create a barrier to assist the magical power of you, the Campione, then it may be possible to defend against Voban's full powered attack. Now is the time to make a gamble."

"Though it might fail, but it's worth a try."

Liliana and Erica had no intention of retreating, and though their concern was gratifying, they clearly lacked careful consideration.

Just as Godou was about to yell with all his strength.

...! ...! ...! ...! ...! Noises were heard.

As Godou's gaze met with Liliana beside him, she silently nodded.

"Like Yuri, Lily can see things that normally cannot be seen, and hear what normally cannot be heard. A true and proper witch who possesses a miko's disposition. So long as she says we have a shred of a chance for victory, it is worth taking the gamble. —Godou, let us fight alongside you."

Erica said sincerely.

Since she said it, Godou could only accept that he was not alone . If he actually fought just by himself, that old man is definitely undefeatable. In that case—

"...If this fails, then I will go to hell in place of the two of you."

"Don't say something stupid. If we fail, we go together, right? To me, that would be preferable."

Erica and Liliana nodded.

Their smiles looked very gentle.

Thinking back, he had been troubling this girl all this time, though she had also brought trouble to him, so they were even.

Of course, perhaps Erica and I might actually be great partners.

As Godou confirmed once again what had been vague thoughts , he glared at Voban.

The old Devil King raised his arm towards the sky and was about to make a downwards gesture.

It began to rain once more.

At the same time, it came. Crashing through the thunder clouds, tearing through the skies, the extremely bright flash finally descending towards the ground, without a doubt this was the strongest thunderstrike seen this day.

—As the one who holds all victory in my hands, I am the strongest. All enemies, all who harbor enmity, will be vanquished!

Godou consumed Verethragna's divine power to the highest degree, and prayed hard that the thunder descending upon him will miss its mark.

Erica and Liliana then used barrier magic to create an invisible shield, as if helping this force of will meld together with magical power—but it was not enough.

To repel the fully energized strongest electrical attack, the power of three people was not enough.

Certain of his victory, the old Campione laughed heartily.

And so, Godou began to pray for himself to get even stronger—give me power, lend me power!

I am willing.

Hearing the answer, Godou nodded.

Neither a lone person nor merely three people. In fact, all those gathered present were Voban's enemies and they lent Godou their power.

How could he lose now!?

—Turning to dust and returning to the earth, these [Dead Servants] lingered here as souls.

They appeared out of the darkness once again, returning above ground in their corpse form.

"—What! How can it be the servants!?"

Voban's eyes were wide with surprise.

However, it was too late. Voban had underestimated their existence.

Fueled by their anger and hatred towards the old king, these revived servants numbered in the dozens.

The majority of these were magi when alive, and amongst them were masters of their craft equal to Erica and Liliana. They also melded their powers with Godou's magic.

Godou's magical power was able to resist Voban's thunder, and gradually expanded as if it was going to burst.

—Finally, the extremely powerful lightning changed its trajectory.

The wrath of the thunder god which should have consumed Godou, Erica and Liliana, strayed from its target, and raced towards the massive metal tower nearby!

Rumble rumble !!

It was the loudest sound of thunder today.

Hit by violet lightning, the Tokyo Tower began to light on fire.

In spite of the wind and rain, the flames illuminated the ground , and under the yellow glow, made visible Dejanstahl Voban's face that was distorted with rage.

"—Lightning."

Looking at the sky, Godou whispered the spell words.

"O lightning! O lightning! I am the conqueror who vanquished a thousand with a hundred, vanquished ten thousand with a thousand, and vanquished tens of thousands with ten thousand. Now for the sake of I who stand on the side of justice, release bright and shining brilliance, and grant me divine power!"

Thunderclouds groaned in response to his cries.

Rumble rumble rumble rumble rumble rumble rumble rumble rumble rumble—

A frightful rumbling sound descended from the sky, and in the instant the top level lightning was released, the sky shook, the ground trembled, echoing the sound of the divine realm.

Godou originally did not have the power to control this type of lightning.

However, since there were the thunderclouds gathered by Voban, it was different if one suddenly attacked at the moment he relaxed his guard.

Having barely evaded the critical hit released by the old king, Godou yelled with all his strength and released all his magical power.

In order to obtain the power to rule over the gathered thunderclouds, Godou immediately spoke the spell words to master them, infusing the full power of the [Goat] form.

(In that instant, everyone within a one kilometer radius of the Tokyo Tower had part of their life force taken, and fell unconscious as if afflicted with anemia. Godou only found out much later.)

To Voban who focused everything in the attack, though it was a moment, but this could distract his concentration.

"Hmm, damn brat! These are the actions of a thief!"

In order to take back his domination over the thunderclouds, Voban directed his consciousness towards the air.

However it was too late, if Godou attacked before he succeeded, he would not have enough time—

"Man and devil—I shall smash through all enemies in my way!"

Powerful golden lighting descended towards the ground again.

In fact, it was slightly more powerful than Voban's thunderstrike less than a minute ago.

Part 5

The white smoke that covered the surroundings of the old Campione finally dissipated.

Even though Godou used all his strength and attacked him with a powerful thunderstrike, Voban was not vanquished. Truly, three centuries difference of experience was not just for decoration.

—However, it was enough to exhaust him to his limits.

The old man was struggling to prepare his defenses to receive the next lightning strike, he took his [Sturm und Drang]—and invoked all the power from this authority which ruled the wind, rain, thunder and lightning, causing the electric strike to deviate from its target.

Erica and Liliana both threw their magic swords like spears.

In order to dodge the deadly weapons, the old king lost his concentration and was engulfed by the thunderstrike like a tidal wave, burning to nothing.

However, after that.

The spot where Voban stood seemed to be gathering a mound of sand—no, it's dust—slowly rising and forming the shape of a man, finally recreating the old Marquis' intellectual appearance.

Was this a hidden trump card of this fellow?

Resurrecting just like his own [Ram], Voban has used an authority to evade unavoidable death. Godou could not help but feel nervous.

"Let's start the third round, boy?"

"If that's what you want, let's have two or three more, I will be your opponent until the very end."

The revival just now seemed to have taken a heavy toll on Voban.

His breathing was irregular, magical power was clearly much lower. Godou felt this, and prepared to force his own tired body to summon more lightning.

They were now equal, and victory could go either way!

Behind the two Campiones facing each other, Tokyo Tower was burning up most spectacularly.

Godou's last attack not only struck Voban, it also gave the Tower a final hit. The three hundred meter tall structure of steel was now burning like a giant torch.

The turbulent night had not ended yet, how much more will this city be damaged?

Godou felt his nerves tense, and at that instant.

"...Please stop! Great Marquis, if you do not withdraw, then including me and Kusanagi Godou, as well as the others, blow us all away!"

Angrily glaring at the two [Kings], Yuri yelled.

For some reason she looked extremely weak, and was held in Erica's arms. The Hime-Miko totally drenched in rain, was placing her life on the line to such an extent.

"As long as I am gone, you will have no reason to battle, so please make a decision."

To think that Yuri would speak such words.

As if scolded lightly by Yuri's awe-inspiring expression, Godou was going to speak, but Voban responded first.

"Are you serious, miko? Are you meaning to say it is fine to kill you right here?"

"Correct. If the residents of the city are dangerously threatened because of me, then I have no other recourse but to sacrifice myself ."

Seeing Yuri speak with such a stern expression, Voban was speechless for a second.

"Little lady, one who doesn't understand the joy of hunting, you just killed the mood... Fine, to have reached this point, I will now declare in the name of I, Dejanstahl Voban."

Voban's eyes—the evil eyes burning like the irises of a tiger.

Unable to suppress rage and boiling passion. Are we finally fighting? Godou pushed his body forward.

"Brat! Kusanagi Godou, victory is yours! This time, you win!"

Declared the victor by such hateful tones, Godou was surprised.

"You're saying I won?"

"I already said before this hunt. The only rule was I will kill you and catch the girl! However, I misjudged your power. I am now tired at this stage... If I continued fighting you like this, I won't have excess power to guarantee the safety of the little lady. Thus, you have won."

Voban explained impatiently.

Come to think of it, he did say something like that. Realizing the old man had been treating the current deathmatch as just a game, Godou felt rooted to the spot.

"If I cannot even abide by the rule I set myself, then I have lost! I underestimated your power, I was defeated by my own naiveté! ...I may have gone senile, failing to see through what kind of fellow you were, the first time I laid my eyes on you."

At those forward staring evil eyes burning with emerald light, Godou glared back without backing down.

He felt that he would not lose even if the fight continued, but if the other side wanted to stop, it was fine. It was almost time to settle things.

"Next time we encounter each other, I will hunt you with all my strength. Be prepared for that day. Hone your skills, experience more adverse battles. I won't be so easy to handle if I were serious. "

Turning his back to Godou and the rest, the old Campione strode forward.

The roadside was tinted with an orange glow by the Tokyo Tower fire, and the depths of darkness were breached by swirls of wind and rain.

"Keep this in mind, between [Kings] like us, there can only exist one of the following relationships—ignoring each other, pacts of nonaggression, or eternal enemies dueling to the very end. And now, you will be my enemy!"

These were the last words left behind by Voban.

Once his figure disappeared, the [Dead Servants] who had re-materialized turned back into dust, and truly started their journey towards eternal peace.

May they rest in peace, however—

At the same time as he prayed, Goudou lost strength, it was really tiring after all.

Though he did not know about the future, but at least they all survived. However, this did not mean everything was over.

"That tower sure burns well, this is a unique scene."

"You are talking like a devil as usual. Such style certainly makes one want to sigh."

"That should be made of steel, right? Since it's raining, I guess it won't be burning for too long... Ah, I did something bad again..."

As Godou held his head in his arms, Erica and Liliana also went limp.

They were also at their limit, and with their hazy consciousness, the three of them looked out at the red and white Tokyo Tower that was burning most spectacularly.

The Tower's height was 332.6 metres.

Originally built as a communications tower, it later became a Tokyo landmark and famous tourist attraction. Built over fifty years ago, it was a very familiar milestone to local residents.

"In that case, is Mariya ok? ...What happened, you look very tired?"

Godou asked the very lifeless looking Yuri.

Mentally it was obvious, but she should not have been exerting herself physically. This level of fatigue was incomprehensible. At that point, the three girls sighed all together.

What is going on, they were very surprised, Godou had this feeling.

"Godou, have you noticed what you have done?"

Erica was the first to respond, and then Yuri and Liliana began to explain to him the side effects brought upon by the [Goat] form.

Hearing that he had been empowering himself with the life force of everyone around him, Godou was struck with intense shame and worry.

"W-will someone die because of this? What's the situation? What a dangerous form...!"

"I think that probably will not happen. After all, even weak as I am, I only collapsed slightly as if with anemia... Maybe just report it a bit. When Godou-san let loose that final lightning attack, it felt like my consciousness was blown very far away, and then I fell."

"A-a-a-are you ok, Mariya? I hope others are fine too—"

Godou frantically tried to search the illuminated surroundings of the Tokyo Tower.

...On further thought, he hoped that any people in the Tower were also fine. Though it was night, it was impossible for there to be no one.

"When Voban was summoning the storms, the Tokyo Tower seemed to have issued a thunder and wind evacuation warning already. I had Amakasu-san confirm just now, so it was most fortunate in spite of everything..."

Yuri's words relieved Godou's self-reproach slightly. But still, knowing he was responsible for a disaster, he still felt very uncomfortable.

Every time was like this, and this time was no ordinary scale.

Watching the depressed Godou, Yuri sighed and walked over.

"Godou-san, the responsibility of this incident does not rest solely upon you. I am your accomplice, so please cheer up. If there

is any problem, I will gladly accept punishment together with you. "

"Mariya..."

"Did I not say that wherever you go, I will follow? Have you forgotten?"

Gazing directly at Godou's face, Yuri's eyes were more gentle than any goddess. Caught in such a gaze, Godou could not help being mesmerized, but at that moment...

Cough.

Hearing a light cough behind him, Godou turned around to look.

It was Erica, who had lowered her head and coughed lightly.

"What is it!? Are you ok, was it because of me!?"

"Perhaps... Yes, Godou. Come over a bit. My chest is not feeling well..."

Seeing his partner in a rare state of apparent weakness, Godou went over completely gullible.

...Thinking back, that was his greatest blunder that night.

"Is there anything I can do? Let's go to the hospital, pull yourself together!"

Completely drenched by the rain, Erica's body felt rather cold, at the same time she was quite exhausted.

While he gently stroked her back, Godou leaned closer to support her slender body. At that moment the attack came.

Erica reached out with her hands in a well-trained manner, and lifted Godou's face.

He felt a seductively beautiful and moist gaze looking at him.

"Kusanagi Godou—from what I understand, even Mariya is fine . How could you possibly believe that this devil woman, who is even healthier than an ox, would be weakened? Looks like you are still too gullible..."

Liliana commented with a critical tone.

It was exactly as she said, Godou who was now caught in Erica's clutches completely agreed, but there was no helping it. After such an intense battle, anyone would let down their guard...

"S-so Erica, could you stop the pranks! This is too indecent!"

"Since the atmosphere between Yuri and Godou changed completely, I felt worried and had to act... Hey, what did you two do exactly?"

Showing a witch's smile whose beauty shook one from the core, Erica kept asking.

Her gentle hands were lovingly holding Godou's face and caressing his head, as if trying to locate and retrieve some hidden code with her delicate hands.

If he didn't answer properly, these slender hands could probably crack his skull open in an instant.

Suddenly worried for an inexplicable reason, Godou felt himself retreating, while Yuri on the side seemed to have her head bowed as if guilty.

"What I am slightly concerned of is how you prepared the [Sword] against the Marquis. Ah, though I already asked on the phone, but could you tell me once again? It's just a small thing, right?"

Erica was whispering in Godou's ear.

And then she began to kiss his ear lightly, and moved on to his lips. It began with a light touch between the lips, but it soon evolved to Erica's lips licking Godou's, and then beginning to suck, and proceeding to boldly extend her tongue to entangle—

"Y-You have no shame..."

Liliana was watching from the side with her face bright red.

Despite saying that, she seemed to be watching with great interest and displayed no intention of diverting her gaze. What

could one say? Godou was filled with chagrin, but given the way he allowed Erica to toy with him all the time, he was not qualified to comment on others.

Just like idiot couples in a brazen display of public affection, with a lover on his lap and engaging in intimacy without regard of others.

That was the only way to describe the current state of affairs, but Godou felt like a frog within the sights of a snake.

His heart was full of fear and terror, as if he was going to be killed any moment now.

Even Yuri, who used to reprimand such situations instantly, was speechless.

Though her blushing face looked like she wanted to say something, she quickly bit her lip and swallowed her words. She was probably feeling the same sense of terror and guilt.

"Aya, good job everyone. So anyway, just leave the firefighting and other clean up to us. Your drenched bodies must be cold, right ? Let's all get a good rest—hey, what happened? The atmosphere feels a little strange."

Amakasu suddenly appeared and remarked casually.

Even so, Godou and Yuri were still silently supporting their stiff bodies, while Liliana was watching things unfold with indignation yet laced with heavy interest.

On the other hand, Erica was skillfully balancing herself on Godou's lap doing as she pleased.

Epilogue

"Hahaha, so that's how it went. Godou punished the old gramps . Congratulations, this is really something to celebrate, very good."

—Tuscany, Italy.

In the countryside of the little town Siena, known for its beautiful gothic architecture, the king was [having an audience].

Looking into the distance, the rolling hills stretching across the landscape were covered by the lush green of early summer.

One could probably call this a beautiful green wonderland. However, this scenery of scattered wilderness was unique to southern Tuscany.

On the hillside bank of a small stream, a certain [King] was idly holding a fishing rod.

"Could it be that you thought he could not win? How sad, I should have made a bet from the start... As expected of my rival... My good eternal rival."

Muttering to himself with excitement, he pulled in the dangling fishing line.

A tall, slim, handsome man with blonde hair.

His body, flexible as a whip, was dressed casually in a short-sleeved shirt and pants.

Sitting on the bank, he had a long rod by his side that was heavily wrapped under many layers of cloth.

—Liliana Kranjcar knew. Wrapped in that package was the [Sword] that was like forged steel. Italy's proud [King] Salvatore Doni never went anywhere without a sword by his side.

It was his pride, ego, and privilege.

"It does counts as a victory, but to have proceeded in that manner, you really cannot call it a beautiful victory at all..."

"Whether flawless or scraped off the ground like rubbish, a victory is a victory."

Doni answered Liliana's accusation with one closed eye.

The one who made such an expression was the good humored youth who was extremely friendly and loved to joke around.

"Yes, yes. I have contacted the Bronze Black Cross and the grandfather who caused you such grief. Offering my beloved knight to that unsavory old man, I will never allow it."

"Be-beloved!? I am Sir's...!?"

Liliana asked greatly surprised, when did it turn into something like this!?

—Erica Blandelli had advised her before the return trip back to Italy. To have a meeting with Doni prior to returning to Milan.

The course of action taken by Liliana in this incident, needed approval by the [King] of this country.

This was due to the grandfather who was an important figure in the Bronze Black Cross. It was necessary to explain the incident properly.

It was three days after the duel of the two [Kings] in Tokyo.

Liliana was visiting Siena, Doni's base of operations, in order to call on and report to him.

"Let's spin it that way. It should be easier for them to accept, right? —Anyway, it would be quite troublesome if I actually fell in love with girls, but it makes a good cover story."

Softly spoken words which one cannot pretend to have never heard, were disclosed from the [King]'s mouth.

I will pretend I never heard it. Liliana bowed her head with such determination.

"What I am most interested in, is still Kusanagi Godou. How that child will rapidly mature, I am really looking forward to it. Will it take two years or one? Half a year would be pushing it? When he really masters Verethragna's authority, that will be our next rematch. I have been eagerly anticipating ever since that day, really..."

The Campione of the Sword was muttering as if looking forward to a day of blessing.

Liliana's body shook.

Perhaps, it was mistaken to think of Salvatore Doni as Kusanagi Godou's ally. His eagerness to fight was so overwhelming, even greatly surpassing Dejanstahl Voban, and would be a frighteningly formidable opponent.

This unsettling thought entered her mind.

It was lunch time on the roof at Jounan Academy's high school section.

The duel with Voban was three days ago, and all the wounds from the battle had been healed. Godou and his group were just about to have lunch.

Familiar faces—Godou, Erica, Yuri and Shizuka, the four of them.

"Hey Shizuka, it's not good for you to be coming in and out of the high school building all the time, right? What would people think?"

Godou tried to advise his younger sister.

During lunch, Shizuka had come to Godou's classroom with an unhappy expression.

Occasionally after school, she would also come over and went home together.

Thanks to her, strange rumors of 'Kusanagi's sister is a bro-con' have surfaced recently. Amongst the boys in the class, the most incomprehensible one was classmate Soramachi who spoke things like 'I have 108 younger sisters in 2D' and kept asking 'Must be a stepsister, right? It has to be a stepsister!?'

These problems were all caused by Shizuka's suspicious actions.

"About that, Onii-chan, I don't actually want to do this, but in order to supervise my unruly older brother and prevent him from doing suspicious things, I have no other choice. Do not misunderstand."

Shizuka's words were full of barbs.

Dear sister, when have my actions been indecent? But Shizuka only snorted and ignored Godou's protest.

"No indecency? No suspicious acts? Where did you find the confidence to declare such rubbish! The current situation—compared to four days ago, what happened!?"

Shizuka pointed with her finger at the other three.

In the center, Godou was sitting cross-legged on the picnic cloth on the ground. To his left was Erica sitting sideways on her legs while Yuri sat very straight and proper on his right—the three of them in a neat row.

"I don't find anything strange?"

"Yes, what is it, Shizuka-san, what do you find amiss?"

"I think I know what you are getting at, but there is nothing that needs to be changed, isn't this great?"

Godou and Yuri were puzzled with their heads tilted, while Erica simply shrugged.

To the little sister, their responses only added fuel to the fire, and her cute face tensed further as she roared loudly.

"Then let me ask you, why is Mariya-senpai sitting so naturally right next to Onii-chan? To have two girls waiting on you on each side, are you some kind of king? And look, why is Mariya-senpai pouring tea into Onii-chan's cup? You should do these things yourself!"

Ice cold green tea was being poured into the water bottle cap used by Godou as a cup.

As Godou listened to his sister while he finished the tea in his cup, Yuri sitting beside him naturally picked up the water bottle on the side, and poured for him again in one flowing motion.

Witnessing this scene, Shizuka's glare became even more dangerous.

—As a side note, this water bottle was brought by Yuri herself, and cold tea brewed by someone like her with knowledge of the tea ceremony, was much tastier than canned tea.

"Mariya-senpai! Even if you were a newly wedded wife, you don't have to go so far! For this kind of idiotic brother, that tasteless tea from the self-serve area is good enough!"

"I am Godou-san's—n-newly wedded wife? Please do not say something so embarrassing..."

Described so by her junior from the same club, Yuri replied with her face all red.

"Damn it, to be responding to the word 'wife' and even suddenly changing her way of addressing him."

This kind of scene happened on a daily basis during the recent lunch breaks.

Today after school, Godou was invited by Erica to the Blandelli home.

No, not really invited.

"Godou, please come over to my house, we must finalize our plans for the summer today... Of course, you cannot refuse."

After the last lesson ended, Erica who sat next to him made such an announcement.

...That night after the battle with Voban, Godou and Yuri finally fled from the pursuit of the [Diavolo Rosso], but were caught the next day at school, and subject to serious interrogation.

There were none of Shizuka's angry snarls or scary threats.

However, Erica was a capable and experienced inquisitor, and kept raising circumstantial evidence to accuse them of suspicious activities, skillfully using all sorts of methods to make them come clean with the truth.

By the time they noticed, everything the two of them did that night was fully disclosed.

"Yes, so it was like that... Yuri is unexpectedly daring, and Godou turned out to be surprisingly unfaithful..."

"Come on, to describe that situation as infidelity, isn't that a bit inappropriate..."

"Th-That is correct, we only did that because we had no other choice."

"Aya, it's fine. I already mentioned before, that even with one more, an extra lover would be fine. If it's Yuri whom I can trust, it's not a bad choice at all."

Towards Godou and Yuri who desperately tried to explain, Erica responded with a smile.

The backlash when love was seriously betrayed... Words related to that theme kept floating into Godou's mind, in the face of that glamorous yet frightening smile.

A few days after that.

Godou and Yuri were passing each day with a feeling that they cannot oppose Erica.

Guilt and uneasiness. Both of them carried such feelings, or rather, the interrogation which was acted out like a deliberate performance, perhaps that was Erica's true conspiracy.

And then, today after school.

Godou and Arianna were sitting in the living room, and Erica spoke.

"Then let's decide immediately? Mountains or the sea, which is better? Somewhere to stay for about two weeks. Staying in Japan is fine too. Or to the place where our feelings first developed—the island of Sardinia would be nice for a vacation. Arianna, where should we go?"

The mistress was asking her assistant and maid who was about to serve coffee.

Arianna replied in a very good mood.

"If that's the case, I have never spent a summer in Japan. It must be very fun, with shaved ice, summer festivals, fireworks, bravery challenges and all that. I am sure Erica-sama will enjoy it."

"Is that so? Aya, but Hong Kong where I haven't been to for quite a while would also be nice."

The female faction seemed to be happily discussing summer vacation plans.

If that was the case, it was pointless to speak out. Godou simply listened without registering their words.

"Godou you need to express an opinion. Otherwise the two of us will be making the decision?"

"Sure, that's fine. You two wish to travel, so even if I didn't interrupt—"

However, the response was surprising.

"What are you talking about, this is the plan for the trip before our wedding, it has to have input from both of us... Through this trip, our love will deepen and become stronger."

"What?"

"Having a child during travels sounds nice too. As long as it is Godou and my child, whether a boy or girl, either will be very strong. Doesn't such a future sound wonderful?"

"...What?"

Godou sounded like a parrot, repeating the same word again.

Erica with her familiar devilish smile, faced Godou whose mind had been halted. It was an extraordinarily seductive and devilish smile that could melt a man.

"Like I said, have a baby, going together on a tour, aren't those kinds of things natural?"

"E-Erica-sama is truly bold, but it's true, since it is just two people together, and with such a close relationship, it could very well happen."

Arianna was nodding vigorously beside her mistress.

Godou felt dizzy and wracked his wits trying to retort. Following such a plan would be the death of him. His continued struggle up to now would have been for nothing!

"I-Impossible, that kind of vacation! My family won't agree anyway. If Shizuka knew she will oppose vehemently, that's right, children must have the blessing of the family, right?"

"No problem, we already have grandfather's approval."

Godou's bluff was swiftly called by Erica.

"Yesterday when I went to discuss, he agreed instantly saying ' perhaps it is time for that fellow to have such experiences, please have a good time as long as it doesn't cause trouble.' Isn't such an understanding grandfather a blessing?"

"Not at all! Damn, why would grandfather say such a thing!?"

In the three days after Voban departed.

The ones most busy were the members of the History Compilation Committee.

Organizing the whole operation to extinguish the Tokyo Tower fire, tabulating and cleaning up damage caused by the storm, and treating the residents near Shiba Park who had their life force taken and entered a state of unconsciousness.

Furthermore, they even used wizardry and other methods to manipulate information.

Thorough investigations on all eye witnesses of the incident, and restricting their subsequent communications. Many of those witnesses were shocked while others were extremely excited, or even had nervous breakdowns. These people were given warnings , letting them know that unnecessary speech would be inadvisable.

These people will continue to be monitored after returning to their normal lives, and no matter the number of dissident minorities, the controversial practice of hypnosis wizardry will be used to perform memory manipulation etc. —

It was for all these tasks that the members of the History Compilation Committee have been busy rushing about.

"Aya, this is why we are labeled as villains. Look at these operatives wearing all black and running about, hahaha."

Amakasu spoke proudly while wearing a black suit with the letters 'MIB' emblazoned on it.

Despite his workload, he had gone to Nanao Shrine to report to Yuri about the progress of things.

"...Have I not warned you so many times, not to be so frivolous? "

"Please give me a break, I'm already so overworked that I need to have a little fun... Ever since that day, I haven't even gone home yet, only taking short naps in the car."

"S-sorry. I am really sorry that we have brought you so much trouble."

Yuri bowed deeply in response to Amakasu's complaints.

"However, this is our work so please don't let it weigh on your mind. Anyway, it looks like Yuri-san and Kusanagi Godou's personal relationship has progressed very well. To selflessly devote assistance to each other, perhaps the red string of fate has already bound the two of you!"

"Red string!? What do you mean?"

"So, I think Kusanagi Godou also likes Yuri-san. Luckily it is almost summer vacation. To further your relationship, you definitely need to have four or five dates at least. I look forward to it."

"D-date!? Please do not say something stupid like that! That kind of behavior is too early for us!"

Just as Yuri tried to loudly protest against Amakasu's hinted suggestions.

The cellphone beside her rang. Looking at the screen, it turned out to be the topic of discussion—Kusanagi Godou who had called .

"Oh, that call came at just the right time. Then Yuri-san should take action as soon as possible. Who knows, this call may very well be asking you out with just the two of you."

"Nothing like that! Please do not eavesdrop... Yes, hello~"

Hiding away from the curious Amakasu, Yuri pressed the button to take the call.

'Ma-mariya, I am sorry for suddenly calling, I want to discuss something with you. Can you help me?'

"What is it? Has Marquis Voban resurfaced?"

'No, it's Erica. She wants to pull me along on a pre-wedding trip , and even got my grandfather as an accomplice, so things are going smoothly her way. During the summer, if I don't find a place to hide I will be caught and taken away. Who knows how bad things will get! Do you have any place to suggest?'

"What? No way, Godou-san, you cannot be deceived by that kind of invitation!"

'Yes, but if she does it by force I can't do anything about it. Finding a place to hide is probably the only way.'

"Really, please show some determination. Preparations are necessary, but Godou-san's attitude is key. You are still so unreliable."

'S-sorry...'

"I will try to find some suitable location, but please try on your own first."

After such a conversation, Yuri hung up.

Really, whether the Italian girl who simply had no manners or Godou who cannot refuse resolutely, they are always bringing trouble. No way around it, just do your best!

"What is it, Yuri-san, is it another conflict? Let's discuss it."

Amakasu spoke softly to Yuri who was occupied with her internal ranting.

For example, his manner of speech would be like a con artist, who had found a good and honest person and would use all methods to snare his prey. It was that kind of deceptive speech, but Yuri did not notice.

"Ah, sure. Actually it is about Godou-san and Erica-san—"

"Hoho, it turns out to be something like that. But Yuri-san, this is an opportunity, a great chance... To hide away with Godou-san together this summer, let us arrange the location!"

"—!? Is this a joke? Godou-san and I, just the two of us?"

Beaming like a (fake) loving elder, Amakasu smiled slightly.

Shaken by that kind of smile, Yuri suppressed her words of protest.

"Then, let me explain in order, traveling as a pair on the run has an almost magical effect on accelerating male female relationships —"

The plum rain season was about to end in late June.

It was the early summer dusk heralding the opening of the gates of summer.

Featuring Yuri who had been hit by an intense culture shock and manipulated by skillful deception, and the scheming Erica who was not above using brute force, the season for their intense rivalry was about to begin.

Afterword

"The protagonist has ten special abilities, I think that's too much . It feels like an initial whim created a very exaggerated setting, perhaps we should reduce it by half? To be honest, this is very troublesome to write. Let's just say it makes things difficult for me! !"

"Just continue with this setting, it will be fine right? Continue writing like this!"

-- Prior to writing the first volume, that was the dialogue between the author and the editor.

Greetings. We meet again, or perhaps for the first time.

Thanks to everyone's support of this work [Campione!], the second volume is now for sale. Much thanks. Please do not overthink the reasons for the long interval between the first and second volumes. There were absolutely no careful deliberations over whether to continue the story or not. Absolutely none. Never thought about it.

If one were to describe the battle between Kusanagi Godou and the strange mysterious dragon of the Tonegawa (Doni in short), it would be an intense death match with a strong characteristic feeling -- if such a short story was proposed, would it be ignored with a response like "no, that won't work!"? Was this for real? For this purpose I went and researched the history of the Tonegawa, and became a bit of a Tonegawa expert!

To readers who picked up the book to browse, attracted by the beautiful miko illustrations of Sikorsky-san, and were dismayed to find it was not the first volume and wondered whether or not to buy it. That type of thought is premature.

I believe this work belongs to the genre of hero fantasy, and pays tribute to Cimmeria's Conan-san and Melinibone's Elric-san. " The first volume, is not necessary the beginning of the story" is the idea.

Thus, there is no problem with starting with the first or the second volume. Rest assured as you take this book to the cashier. No problem, when I was looking for original editions of American comics, there were often times that I couldn't find a previous issue. I got used to it.

...Though that is what I thought, but I am wondering if it is time to write a "beginning story."

And so, the next release, Volume 3 will have the themes of the " joyful(?) summer" and "beginnings of the Campione." The stage will be set on the ocean, and I will look forward to Sikorsky-san's swimsuit illustrations.

Takedzuki Jou, October 2008

Translator's Notes and References

1. ↑ **Dalmatia**: a historical region on the eastern coast of the Adriatic Sea, in Croatia. [1]
2. ↑ **Zadar**: Capital of the old Dalmatia
3. ↑ **Dame**: the female title equivalent of 'Sir' when addressing or referring to a Knight
4. ↑ **Balor of the Evil Eye**: king of the Fomorions, a race of semi-divine giants in Irish mythology similar to the Titans, who had a mystical eye in the center of his forehead and one directly opposite on the back of his head; following a prophecy he was killed by his grandson, despite his best attempts to stop it.
5. ↑ **Miko**: Miko are usually Japanese shrine maidens. However, in this story the term also refers to a type of magic-user, and not all of those magical miko are shrine-maidens, or Japanese. That is why we left the term as miko whenever it shows up.
6. ↑ **2LDK**: 2LDK is a Japanese shorthand for an apartment with 2 bedrooms and a combined living room, dining room, and kitchen area.
7. ↑ **Homo homini lupus est** is a Latin phrase meaning "man is a wolf to [his fellow] man."
8. ↑ **Shamusho**: The building used as the administrative office of a shrine
9. ↑ **L-size**: Also known as 3R, or 9 x 13 cm.
10. ↑ **Kami** (神) is the Japanese word for the spirits, natural forces, or essence in the Shinto faith.
11. ↑ **Tachi** (太) is a type of traditional Japanese sword worn by the samurai class of feudal Japan.

12. ↑ **Tachi** (太) is a type of traditional Japanese sword worn by the samurai class of feudal Japan.
13. ↑ **Flamenco** is a genre of music, song and dance from Andalusia in southern Spain, noted for its energetic, staccato style.
14. ↑ **Excalibur** refers to King Arthur's famous sword, and is denoted 'Spirit Sword' in the kanji
15. ↑ **Yamaraja** is the ruler of the underworld in Buddhist and Taoist legends. When people die and their souls are taken to the underworld, they are judged by Yamaraja.
16. ↑ **Yasha** is the name of a broad class of nature-spirits which appear in Hindu, Jain and Buddhist mythology. Possessing a dual personality. the yasha may be an inoffensive nature-fairy on one hand; but there is also a darker version which is a kind of ghost that haunts the wilderness and devours travellers.
17. ↑ **Phoebus**: another name for Apollo, meaning light.
18. ↑ **nukti eoikôs**: τ in Greek (from Homer's Illiad), meaning ' resembling the night.'
19. ↑ **Feng Bo** (風): a Chinese mythical beast ruling over the domain of wind. Taken literally, the name means the Earl of Wind.
20. ↑ **Yu Shi** (雨): an ancient Chinese deity in charge of rain. The name means the Master of Rain.
21. ↑ **Lei Gong** (雷): the Chinese thunder god, the name means the Duke of Thunder.